

MY PEOPLE PERISH FOR LACK OF PHILOSOPHY

*An inaugural lecture delivered
at the University of Ibadan*

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By

KOLAWOLE A. OLU-OWOLABI
*Professor of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
University of Ibadan
Ibadan, Nigeria.*

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The Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Registrar, Librarian, Provost of the College of Medicine, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dean of the Postgraduate School, Deans of other Faculties, and of Students, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Preamble

Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher who created you from the clot of blood (Holy Quran Chapter 96, verse1).

Although the ritual of an inaugural lecture is a heritage of the academic tradition from the medieval Europe where the idea of the university in its present form originated, prevailing circumstances of our time today necessitate certain adjustments to this tradition in many of the Nigerian universities. At our own University of Ibadan, one of such amendments to the tradition is that rather than at inauguration, as the name implies, or as a matter of right or duty, as is the case in some other universities elsewhere, an inaugural lecture has become a privilege, a waiting game, which comes only when one is fortunate to survive in the system until it gets to one's turn on the long queue of aspiring candidates. For this reason, the moment of presenting an inaugural lecture has become an occasion for celebration, or an occasion for thanksgiving.

For me, the privilege of standing on this podium to profess my academic vision has always been a dream which I never thought could be realized, for the simple reason, that I never believed I would live long enough to become a professor. Therefore, the question of delivering an inaugural lecture does not arise. I am therefore grateful to the Almighty God for sparing my life to this moment and for counting me worthy to be among the living today.

My inaugural lecture is the third from the Faculty of Arts this academic session, a beneficiary of the new university policy of granting those faculties with many aspiring lecturers the opportunity to clear their backlog. The first two lectures from the Faculty of Arts this session were, respectively, from

African Studies and Linguistics. Mine is coming from the discipline of philosophy, the first academic discipline and, indeed, the progenitor of all other disciplines. For this reason, I like to believe that whatever I say in this forum will not only be on behalf of philosophy alone but also of all other areas of knowledge.

This is the second inaugural lecture from the Department of Philosophy, the first one having been presented in 1983 by the founding father of the department, the late Professor Peter Oluwambe Bodunrin. We need to be reminded that Philosophy, despite its foundational role, was not considered appropriate to be part of the curriculum of this University until 1974. But despite its late arrival, apart from Peter Bodunrin, the department has also produced three other eminent Professors: Godwin Sogolo, Felix Adeigbo and Olusegun Oladipo. These scholars were unable to present their inaugural lectures due to no fault of theirs, but simply because of the long delay that hitherto attended the culture of inaugural lecture in this University. Professor Olusegun Oladipo, on his own part, was preparing to give his inaugural lecture in 2009 when, tragically, he was seized by the cold hands of death. May his gentle soul continue to rest in eternal peace. Apart from the four mentioned earlier, there are two of us who are professors in the department (Professor Dipo Irele and myself). This department has also produced over fifty doctorates with many of its products serving as lecturers in virtually all the Departments of Philosophy in the country and outside. On account of this, we feel able to say, with some amount of satisfaction, that against all odds the department has done well in just over three and a half decade of its existence in this University.

In the Beginning was the Word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, the main purpose of this lecture today, I like to say from the outset, is not to display my competence

as an academic philosopher, the modesty associated with the discipline of philosophy forbids any such exercise in conceit. Nor is it to serve as an avenue to proclaim my research agenda, because after twenty-eight years of teaching and researching in this University, my research agenda should now be clear or else my employer should be thinking of revisiting our terms of contract. My task in this present lecture is precisely to further strengthen what I have been doing all these years. The essential object of this lecture is in conformity with what the political economist, Thandika Mkandawire, who in a recent inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics, following Richard Henry Tawney, another occupier of a professorial chair at the same institution, regards as the main purpose of an inaugural lecture, vindicating “the claims of the department of knowledge represented by the lecturer against bold, bad men who would question its primacy” (Mkadawire 2010:1). As this scholar envisaged, a scholar in the area of Philosophy whose primacy as a foundational discipline is always disputed needs to confront “those bold, bad men”, who question the primacy of Philosophy. This is precisely my mission in this lecture.

This discourse seeks to correct the erroneous impression that Philosophy is irrelevant to the challenge of transforming the situation of the human society. This lecture is indeed an attempt to vindicate the claim of philosophy that only a critical and rigorous enquiry can put a society on the path of genuine and sustainable transformation. The lecture will further demonstrate through arguments that the precarious situation of the African society and the predicament of the global community are due to the disregard of the philosophical spirit. The lecture will finally maintain that the adoption of the philosophical temperament, of a rigorous, critical and painstaking planning of the African society, will expedite the resolution of the prevailing African crisis. It will also argue that without the philosophical temper, the goodies presented to the global community by the scientific culture could become a burden with the prevailing uncontrolled explorative tendencies of modern technology. Through all

these, this lecture intends to realise the higher ideal of an inaugural lecture as identified by a distinguished predecessor at this same forum, Professor Abiola Irele, who maintains that the valuable goal of an inaugural lecture is to serve "humanity in the unique way and with the special abilities which academics are endowed" (Irele 1982).

The anxiety for the resolution of the African crisis and the excitement about the material transformation created by the scientific and technological revolution in the Western dominated global world made both the African and the global societies to disregard academic disciplines that have only remote, not readily visible utilitarian value for the ailing societies, like the philosophical discipline. It is for this reason that the philosophical discipline has been avoided like a plague or treated like a slave in the contemporary world. To ignore the philosophical because its relevance is not easily discernable is to fail to realize the very strong connection between thought and practice. And to do that is to invite disaster, whether physically, as we have it in Africa, or psychologically, as we feel it in the Western dominated global society. This is the reason why this lecture is provocatively and rhetorically titled **"My People Perish for Lack of Philosophy"**.

The discipline of Philosophy as we have said is a tragic figure, constantly being harassed and with its relevance being questioned not only by outsiders but even by the practitioners of the vocation. The tragic fate of the philosophical discipline is a dual situation. Furthermore, the discipline in its critical habit of revisiting its essence through self criticism is constantly under the threat of self annihilation, this discipline as the foundation of other intellectual disciplines is also constantly being challenged by other disciplines as a useless enterprise that should be eliminated for its "obscurantism" and irrelevance. It is this notion that philosophy is regarded as the first of the so-called useless disciplines that Professor Galloway, formerly of our own Department of Religious Studies, attempted to defend (Galloway 1956). The sciences, the social sciences and even the remaining humanistic disciplines that philosophy conceived and produced at a time in the history of Western scholarly tradition is now in

conspiracy with the policy makers to ensure that the mother discipline is finally shown the way out from the concert of intellectual disciplines.

This act of matricide or a kind of "Oedipus complex" that the rejection of philosophy by other disciplines implies needs to be resisted for the continued survival of the human race. In reaction to this intended matricide by other disciplines, the Austrian philosopher, Joachim Jung, refers to these disciplines "as the unfaithful children who show so little gratitude to the mother of sciences, who brought up all of them" (Jung 2000: 3). In relation to Africa, it becomes ironic that the neglect of the philosophical venture due to the anxiety for the resolution of the pending crisis in the continent is a grievous mistake. The crisis arose in the first place because the African society has operated on the erroneous assumption that social crisis can only be avoided if the society embraces academic disciplines that can provide immediate material values and ignore those disciplines like philosophy whose depth and rigour make their social relevance not apparent to the uncritical mind.

The title of this lecture is therefore an allusion to the biblical passage from the book of Hosea 4:6. The precise quotation is, "*my people perish for lack of knowledge*". A slight adjustment of that spiritual observation is the title of my lecture. If I remain scrupulously faithful to my source and retain knowledge instead of philosophy it would still have been a very poignant and appropriate summary of my academic research in my area of specialization, which is Epistemology. Epistemology, to which I have devoted my research career, is the area of philosophy dealing with the theory of knowledge. Hence, if I have been faithful to the biblical statement, it would have been appropriate to define and express my research vision as a theorist of knowledge. But the real object of that biblical statement is not "knowledge" in its limited sense but rather *applied* knowledge transformed into wisdom. In a sense, it is an idea that is wider than knowledge. This idea encompasses the totality of human values produced after a rigorous reflection. It can only

be captured by the word "philosophy" which connotes the refinement of knowledge, an idea that is nearer in connotation to wisdom than knowledge. It is therefore my considered opinion that the present crisis-ridden society of Africa, and indeed the global community is witnessing crisis in diverse dimensions because of the deliberate neglect of the cluster of values that have become associated with the philosophical enterprise. This is the reason why I believe that the biblical concept, "knowledge", is less appropriate and therefore replaced with the more appropriate word, "philosophy". It is my well-considered belief that perhaps it is the word "philosophy" instead of "knowledge" that appropriately conveys the message and purport of the Bible, but this became lost during the tedious project of translation of this biblical passage from the original Hebrew language to English.

To drive home the point I have been making and also to connect this discourse with the development of my academic career, let me make a digression. This will involve me in a brief autobiography. Like most students of philosophy in this part of the world, I came to philosophy accidentally. Philosophy was chosen for me surreptitiously, but, now with the benefit of hindsight, providentially by my uncle, Professor A. I. Asiwaju, who is today an Emeritus Professor of History. He chose it as a course for me because he considered it as the closest to law that I had intended to study then. My interest in philosophy was further aroused by my discovery that the discipline is not at all as worthless as the ordinary Nigerians of the early eighties considered it to be. I discovered that rather than being sent to a barren, unproductive life of nihilism, I have been given a *golden* opportunity to understand the meaning and essence of human knowledge in all its ramifications through the adoption of the tools for the critical reflection on all human challenges.

It is this interest in Philosophy as foundational to all human knowledge that facilitated my choice of Epistemology, a branch of philosophy devoted to the critical analysis of the justification of the entire human knowledge, during my postgraduate programme. My doctoral thesis submitted to the

Department of Philosophy of the University of Lagos, and successfully defended on the 9th of May 1989 was on the theme of Edmund Husserl's theory that the entire human knowledge can be justified on the basis of the neutrality and transcendence of the subject of knowledge (Owolabi 1989). My critique of this German philosopher and the producer of the phenomenological method of philosophy gave me an insight into the interface between human knowledge, its justification and the connection of these with social issues and problems. My entire career as a researcher became devoted to the discussion of the challenge of human knowledge and its connection to the various crises facing humanity.

I commenced my career in philosophical research and teaching in the early 1990s, when Africa was confronted with numerous crises seeking for urgent solution. Although I was not a specialist in African Philosophy, an attractive area to most of my contemporaries at this period, to continue to research in abstract Western epistemology was to be playing the fiddle like Nero while Rome was burning. It was this situation that necessitated the readapting of my research interest to what can be called, for lack of a better term, "Cultural Epistemology". This contrived area of research focuses on the relationship between the state of culture and knowledge production in the human society. The entire product and conclusion of my research in this respect is that human crises in their multidimensional perspective need to be painstakingly and critically reflected upon before a lasting solution can be attained (Owolabi 1996a). To disregard the philosophical approach to the crisis because of the depth and rigour of its method is to be impatient and hasty in the quest for the solution to the crisis. Ignoring this long but enduring route of resolving social problems through the adoption of the philosophical perspective is perilous. It is now obvious that this conclusion of my research is the theme of this present lecture. As a starting point, we need to discuss the issue of the misunderstanding of the philosophical discipline that always results in its being disregarded as a tool for dealing with human crises.

Who do People say the Son of Man is?

...he asked his disciples saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some say, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets (Matthew 16:13-14).

Misinterpretation and misconception of the philosophical discipline and its goals have been a perennial problem of the discipline. Many philosophers in history have been misunderstood and their mission misrepresented. The question posed as the sub-title of this section is raised in response to the general misunderstanding of the nature and mission of philosophers, myself included, and the first philosopher, the son of the living God. Many philosophers have been accused unjustly of being what they never claim to be or doing what they do not claim. The father of philosophy, Socrates, whose main object was to initiate a moral revolution and sanitize the debased Athenian society, was accused of the exact opposite of his mission. He was indeed condemned to death for corrupting the youths. In so many ways, the enterprise of philosophy is misunderstood, and, deliberately, given a bad name in order to hang it. It seems, indeed as if, historically speaking, most societies have had reasons to treat the philosophical discipline with disdain if not outright hostility because of a misconception borne out of ignorance or deliberate mischief.

It has been argued by some that the misrepresentation of philosophy is due to the fact that the discipline lacks focus and that many of its practitioners confess their inability to define the subject. Cornelius Kruse, an eminent philosopher, accepts this fact and says: "There is hardly any other learned profession which is so easily and persuasively embarrassed when asked to define the nature of its occupation" (Kruse 1949). It is indeed true to say that philosophers are cautious in defining their subject. But the problem surrounding the definition of philosophy is not something that it should be ashamed of because the self-critical nature of philosophy is so pervasive as to include the issue of the definition of its object.

It is of course not true that philosophers cannot define their subject and object; the real truth is that the critical and argumentative nature of the discipline has made its focus and essence controversial. Owing to this persistent polemic, philosophy has not been able to accumulate the dividends of its many centuries of labour. Thus, while other areas of knowledge with relatively short history can boast of their achievements, philosophy is unable to do so. As has been cogently observed: "There is no general agreed body of philosophical knowledge—although there are libraries full of philosophical writings from antiquity to the present day, which are in constant use" (Hacker 2010: 2).

There is no doubt that because philosophy enjoys and thrives on polemics, it has been difficult for its practitioners to consolidate its many centuries of work. It is indeed a fact that "Philosophy is notable for the extent to which disagreement persists among its most able practitioners, despite the fact that the arguments though relevant to the disputed questions are typically well-known to all parties" (Kelly 2006: 173). It is in the nature of the philosophical discipline to reassess issues and engage in critical debate over issues that laymen take for granted. Philosophy's constant self-examination is neither on account of guilty conscience nor is it a product of the indolence of its practitioners. It is a natural and intrinsic feature of the discipline borne out of a "kind of self-critique that it behoves philosophy itself to undertake".

Throughout history and in all societies, philosophy has always been regarded as an unwanted luxury and an unnecessary obscurantism. It is erroneously regarded as an enterprise that is remotely, if at all connected to the reality of the crisis of human existence that every society must perforce react to. Critics thus constantly insist that "*primum vivere, deinde philosophare*" (life first before philosophy). It is, therefore paradoxical, that the real vision and essence of the philosophical enterprise, its *raison d'etre*, is consistently presented as the reason why philosophy should be disregarded. As the great British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, has argued:

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. This view of philosophy appears to result partly from a wrong conception of the ends of life, partly from a wrong conception of the kind of goods which philosophy strives to achieve (Russell 1983: 97).

The desire of the philosophical venture to produce ideas that will foster positive transformation of the society and the cold reception given it by the society has been something of a tragic irony for the subject of philosophy. The philosophical discipline that strives to attain rational justification of all accepted ideas is considered an irrational or a nonsensical venture. As a writer says: "There is nothing so absurd... but that it may be found in the books of the philosophers. Doubtless some philosophers have had all sorts of wisdom except common sense" (Garodia 2011). Indeed, a former doctoral student of mine has expressed this disdain for the philosophical discipline poignantly enough when he observed that philosophy, as an area of academic study or inquiry, seldom attracts any significant interest [these days] from students and governments in third-world countries, for the singular reason that philosophy does not "bake bread neither does it build bridges" (Igbafen 2006: 14).

It is clear that philosophy's unpopularity is due to the erroneous belief that it is mere abstraction that has no relevance to material transformation. But can material improvement be achieved without a deep reflection and critical analysis of the idea that is going to be translated into material facts? It is true that philosophy does not bake bread nor build bridges, but behind the processes of bread baking and bridge making is the mind of a thinker who conceived the very act of bread production and bridge making, though the connection between the two may be so remote as not to be

easily discernible. The reality is that, with or without this connection, philosophy as a reflective enterprise still has its value that cannot just be dispensed with. This is because as Maritain has trenchantly observed:

...men do not live only by bread, vitamins and technological discoveries. They live by values and realities which for their own sake; they feed on that invisible food which sustains the life of the spirit and which makes them aware not of such or such means at the service of their life but of the very reason for living and suffering (Maritain 1961:6-7).

Human civilization, we like to insist, is not essentially and purely just about material production. It occurs when the mind of an individual member of a civilized society is well-cultivated and refined. This is what makes the difference between an uncultured people and a cultivated person. This point has been made brilliantly by Martin Luther King that "the prosperity of a nation depends not on the strength of its fortifications, not in the beauty of its public buildings; but it consists on the number of [its] cultivated citizens, its men of character and enlightenment" (Quoted by Madu 1998:5).

Perhaps the major reason why philosophy is always misinterpreted is because of the internal crisis that always prevails in the house of philosophy, and the contention of some known philosophers about the limited and, in fact, trivial functions allotted to philosophy as a discipline. We know as a fact that owing to Wittgenstein's position that the sole mission of philosophy is no more than to clarify our language, Anglo-American philosophy seduced by the Wittgensteinian postulate, relegated the whole purpose of philosophy to the mere trivial exercise of discovering how philosophical problems are created through the misuse of language. It is this same thinking that has influenced some philosophers to argue that philosophy lacks the potency attributed to it by many of its practitioners and consequently that philosophy "should close shop" and see its mission as

simply part of the conversation of mankind. It is an offshoot of this kind of philosophical tendency that informed the argument of our own Professor Bodunrin in a very controversial paper (Bodunrin 1990) where he maintained that philosophy has no role to play in the project of employing ideas to meet the challenge of social transformation.

The position of the analytic philosophers about the limited and indeed trivial role for philosophy is always taken out of context and employed by the enemies of philosophy to justify the argument that philosophy is irrelevant and uninterested in social problems. The truth of the matter is that the analytic tendency is just a position in philosophy. It is indeed a position opposed by many in the philosophical community. In fact, it is a tendency that is no longer popular among the community of philosophers all over the world today. We must remember that in the same community of philosophers, there are phenomenologists and there are existentialists. These are philosophers who affirm a strong connection between philosophy and human experience and became very influential in their advocacy of using philosophy to confront human challenges. While it may be true that in the Anglo-American tradition of analytic philosophy, the subject philosophy became unpopular and irrelevant to social events, but in the Continental Europe, the influence of philosophy in directing the lives of the people can easily be felt, and is regarded as relevant not only as a respectable academic pursuit but also, more generally, in the social life of this community.

But the misconception of philosophy is not only because of its abstraction and tendency towards obscurantism. Philosophy is often misunderstood because it is always confused with all other kinds of ideas. This may be due to its wide scope and focus. In some cases, it is regarded as a kind of theology or rather mysticism. In some other cases and ironically, it has been seen as an atheistic enterprise devoted to the evil objective of debunking the idea of an omnipotent being. This is an idea that is quite prevalent in this country, forgetting that in the garden of philosophy all flowers are allowed to blossom. Just as we have those considered to be

atheists like Nietzsche, Camus etc, so do we have the theists like Aquinas, Augustine, Kierkegaard and others. Those people who have denounced philosophy as mere atheism always find it easy to forget that for many centuries of the medieval age, philosophy was directed towards the single goal of establishing the dominance of God as an idea.

All these misconceptions and misinterpretations of philosophy and its essence have seeped into the Nigerian society where there appears to be considerable apprehension about it. This is probably the reason why philosophy is not very popular in the Nigerian society. While, for instance University of Legon, in Ghana, established at the same time as our University of Ibadan commenced its academic programme in 1948 with a Department of Philosophy, Ibadan waited till 1974 before establishing a philosophy department. Even the so-called second generation universities—universities of Nigeria, Nsukka, Lagos and Ife—which decided to introduce the subject in their academic programme had problems with the policy makers and people in authority must have regarded the subject as an avenue for breeding insurgents and radicals. Up till today, philosophy is still unpopular among parents and students, and a lot of effort has to be made by the various departments to convince students and their parents that the course is not a breeding place for unrepentant atheists, idealists and fire-eating Marxists. It is hard convincing students of the real nature of philosophy. They always find it difficult to understand that philosophy will only open them to many ideas and equip them with the critical mind to decide which of the ideas to subscribe to. In most cases, a student thoroughly bred in philosophy and armed with such a critical and analytical mind as the discipline seeks to inculcate will treat all these ideas with an open mind. While he/she may subscribe to a particular position, a well-bred student of philosophy will hardly ever be fanatical. However, in spite of this, philosophy graduates are still not given favourable consideration by employers who feel threatened that such graduates may be inadequate and worse still, become agitators and union leaders once

employed. The study of philosophy in contemporary Nigeria is thus often regarded as a waste of time and resources, a jeopardy, as a former Head of State called it.

All these deliberate and quite often uninformed misconceptions of philosophy need to be done away with before the discipline can be allowed to realize its full potentials. This is, in fact, the reason why, even in this present discourse, we consider it eminently useful to discuss the nature and essence of the philosophical discipline in order to debunk the many misapprehensions about it.

Light Shineth in Darkness, and the Darkness Comprehended it Not

In him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:4-5).

The subtitle of this section, committed to the presentation of the real nature of philosophy is metaphorical. Philosophy is considered as a shining light which darkness finds difficult to comprehend. This metaphor is factually and historically apt for, if we consider that knowledge is light, then, philosophy, which is the tool for describing the totality of human knowledge, is surely a kind of illumination. But this illumination has been elusive to the darkness of ignorance that has perennially distorted the image of the enterprise of philosophy. Our task in this section is therefore to remove the shroud that covers the light in order to make the illuminating essence of philosophy apparent.

Etymologically, "philosophy" is from two Greek words, "philo" and "sophia", literally, "love of wisdom". Pythagoras, the ancient Greek thinker, employed this term to describe the group of people who are committed to reflective and discursive practices, geared toward the generation of knowledge for the advancement of the human society. This culture of reflection that commenced formally in ancient Greek society is the progenitor of the entire body of Western knowledge in its various manifestations today. Philosophy is the name conceived in ancient times for the totality of human knowledge

produced through the first epistemological method of critical reflection. As human knowledge increased and improved, new issues and themes were emphasized, new methodologies introduced, resulting in the disciplinary diversities that we have today. Isaiah Berlin explains how the philosophical discipline generates other branches of knowledge in this manner:

To use a simile that I cannot claim to have invented, philosophy is like a radiant sun that, from time to time, throw off portions of itself; these masses when they cool down, acquire a firm and recognizable structure of their own and acquire independent careers as tidy and regular planets; but the central sun continues on its path and does not seem to diminish in mass or radiance. The 'status' and vitality of philosophy is another matter, and seems to be directly connected with the extent to which it deals with issues that are of concern to common man (Berlin 1998: 2).

Isaiah Berlin in this extended metaphor has told the story of the philosophical discipline as a mother that sheds off its part to benefit its descendants. The seeming poverty of philosophy occurs because it does not appear willing either to consolidate its successes or to count its blessings, but sacrifices much for the glory of its offspring. Philosophy started as the encompassing mother of all disciplines. It is borne out of the anxiety to know and understand the universe and all its components, particularly humans, who are the most important occupant of the universe. But as the enterprise grew and progressed, new branches of knowledge were born, and new discipline created. The new areas of knowledge disengaged from philosophy, emphasizing their own restricted subject matters and fashioning out their own peculiar methods. This is the way science emerged by first detaching itself from philosophy, and then focusing on nature in its

multi-dimensional essence as its subject matter. This commenced in the modern age when Bacon discovered the inductive method of experimentation and the total severance of the scientific enterprise was finally completed in the nineteenth century, when the empirical methodology was perfected.

Philosophy is, therefore, said to have mothered all academic disciplines with its persistent employment of the rational faculty. But the disciplinary distinctions which became clearly manifested in the modern age occurred because of (i) the differences in the nature and genesis of the problems addressed by each discipline (ii) the applicable and acceptable method of addressing those problems (iii) the results that are hoped for and the means and method of evaluating the suggested solution by this discipline (Bodunrin 1981b:13). But with these differences in method and approach, each of the intellectual disciplines began to assert their independence from philosophy. With this autonomy of each of the discipline, philosophy is the loser because all the work done on this discipline before the resultant affirmation and establishment of the various autonomous disciplines do not revert to the mother discipline, but claimed by the new discipline generating a further impoverishment of the discipline. Thus, when a philosopher like P.M.S. Hacker laments that "how can the poverty of philosophy be explained?" (Hacker 2010: 3) and Bertrand Russell concedes that, "Philosophy from the earliest times, has made greater claims and achieved fewer results than other branches of learning" (Russell 1967:90), both of them were seeking for an explanation for the impoverishment of the philosophical discipline. The reason for this tragedy of philosophy has been explained in this manner by Nikolai Iribadjakov:

In a sense there seems to be something tragic in the fate of philosophy. In antiquity it incorporated the entire corpus of scientific knowledge and as late as the nineteenth century "philosophy" was the only term to denote scientific activities and

cognition. However as they became independent subjects the special sciences encroached on the problem areas that once had been the property of their mother, philosophy, in which they flourished and to which much of their former fame and significance was due (Iribadjakov 1976: 181).

The story of philosophy is thus that of an overbearing mother who slaves hard to nurture her children but who, rather than gain from her exertions, concedes everything to her children. It is true, that today, after mothering many areas of knowledge a narrow area is left for philosophy to contend with. What then, is left in the repository of knowledge for philosophy to engage with? What is the object and focus of philosophy as an academic discipline today? We can confidently affirm that the reflective nature of philosophy remains with the discipline today. As late A.S. Staniland of our Department once defined the mission of philosophy, it is according to her, essentially the criticism of ideas that are fundamental to human essence and existence (Staniland 1978:3). In this respect, Oguejiofor gives a rough description of what engages the mind of today's academic philosopher:

...Philosophy is concerned with the ultimate foundation of reality; highest and most general judgment of human actions, the **raison d'être** of political systems, the value and reliability of human knowledge, the most basic foundations of human cultures, religions and social ethos as well as with the exposition of our most unconscious presumptions or prejudices. In that vein, philosophy represents the effort of the human reason to provide the last answer to the inquiring mind in its apparently elusive effort to find an explanatory anchor that imparts meaning to life, explaining its origin, giving direction to its activities and providing goals for its quest (Oguejiofor 1998: xvii).

It is clear then that the task of philosophy is to engage in rational and critical reflection on the goals, essence and values of human existence and activities. It is established that the philosophical discipline is an abstract but rational engagement with the human challenges. It is an exploration and evaluation of the human condition in society. It represents society's most general and most fundamental theoretical self consciousness.

Two concepts are cardinal to the task of explaining the subject matter of philosophy as an academic subject in the contemporary world. They are the idea of "rationality" and the idea of "value". In a sense, we can say that while "rationality" defines the means through which philosophical goals are realized, "values" are the goals that the philosophical enterprise strives to attain. The centrality of these two concepts to the enterprise of academic philosophy is explained in this manner:

The special difficulty of philosophy, as we have seen, derives in large part from the fact that it is preoccupied with values and value judgments. It has been argued recently with much penetration and persuasiveness, that philosophy's distinctive subject matter is the criticism of appraisals. Whatever attitude one may take toward the attempt to make values and their appraisal the exclusive field of philosophy, it is no doubt generally admitted that philosophy's task is to find a rational ground and validation for the total range of man's interests, needs and aspirations in which values admittedly play a central and determining part (Kruse 1949: 517).

We concede that what we teach our students in the various departments of philosophy in the world today is narrower than what our predecessors did as classical philosophers. For one thing, it is a fact that the empirical aspect of philosophy has been handed over to the scientists. What remains for philosophy is the critical and rational analysis and appraisal of human challenges in their multi-

farious dimensions in order to attain certain eternal values or truth. It can, therefore, be argued that the philosophical task is that of deciding which goals and values are worthy to pursue and what ends are important. This is the spirit behind the commendation given to the philosophical mind by President John F. Kennedy, in his observation that, "The men who create power make an indispensable contribution to the nation's greatness, but the men who question power make a contribution just as indispensable, especially when that questioning is disinterested, for they determine whether we use power or power uses us" (Quoted by Garlikov 2011: 1).

Today's philosophers are the custodians of human values, the ones who are trained to acquire the critical and analytical tools for confronting and appraising all issues of standards and values. Philosophy, it has been said, "elevates and illuminates life". Philosophy is the beacon light for all other disciplines and all other human activities. The importance and relevance of philosophy is now becoming apparent. Without the illuminating light of philosophy, all other human endeavours can be futile. This is why Saad Malook argued validly as follows:

Without philosophy, a scientist cannot be good, ruler cannot be a good ruler, teacher cannot be a good teacher and even a man cannot be a good man. It rejuvenates life and makes it worth living. The end of philosophy is to discover certainty and objectivity and deliver man's mind from prejudices, conformity, narrow-mindedness and all frivolities in the affairs of daily life. Philosophy loves life and life loves philosophy (Malook 2008: 67).

The philosophical enterprise is the light that illuminates our path in our unending quest for the right way of performing our human activities. Philosophy is the directing force guiding our march to higher civilization. All the talk about the irrelevance of philosophy is due mainly to the fact that the therapy of the philosophical act is of the mind. Just as one

cannot hold the light but rather feels it and gets directed by it so is philosophy intangible, but important in guiding all our activities.

Why, then, is philosophy criticized for its “irrelevance” and “lack of utilitarian value” despite all its functions that we have discussed? Why blame philosophy for not producing bread and building bridges? The reason is not far to seek; it is simply due to a misconception of its nature. According to Pieper, “Those who try to eliminate the substantial incommensurability between philosophy and the world of production only render the philosophical endeavour inauthentic, if not impossible, since the nature and dignity of this endeavour rests on its being not only outside the world of production, but transcendent to it, leading a way beyond its outlines” (Pieper 1992:29-30). Consequently, any attempt to make philosophy a productive venture “leads to a distortion of the very nature of philosophy.” The truth in fact, is that philosophy does possess its practical applications. On the practical side, “the greatness of mind generates tolerance, justice and understanding the growth of which lies the chief hope of the world” (Joad 1976). This ability to produce and sustain higher values for the human society is a testimony to the viability and relevance of philosophy in dealing with the challenges and vicissitudes of the contemporary world and the human condition in general.

To sum up this section, we can assert that philosophy, the “candle of the Lord” as John Locke dubs it, still has the practical value of inculcating the critical attitude that allows us to open our mind to discover those things that are necessary for human advancement. Philosophical knowledge includes the critical appraisal of all our values, norms and ethos. It is interested in the appraisal of our knowledge and the proper way of justifying and disseminating it. Philosophy is preoccupied with the way we manage our social affairs as humans—how we determine and choose our leaders, the process of decision-making in our politics, how our natural rights and inclinations as humans are preserved and protected. Philosophy also investigates and analyses human conduct and

behaviour in order to ensure that in all these the value of goodness is preserved. In a nutshell, in employing the critical and analytical tool, philosophy strives to realize the highest good for the human race, the good life in its different manifestations. In all that it does, philosophy's belief is that through the employment of the rational faculty, the ideals that should guide all human activities are attainable.

Come let us Reason together

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:18).

We are choosing Aristotle, the ancient Greek thinker and acclaimed father of science, to serve as our inspiration in establishing the foundational role of philosophy as the basis of the rational activities of all intellectual practices. Aristotle presented philosophy as the highest effort at partaking of the rational practice that defines man as unique and different from all other species. He went further to maintain that this rational capacity is one that humans share with the creator. O'Hear in a recent book makes the following observation about philosophy which is very germane to our point here;

According to Aristotle, the highest activity of which human beings are capable is philosophical contemplation. In this we fulfill our nature as rational beings. Reason is our highest and most distinctive capacity, and in philosophy we engage in reasoning in its purest form. We contemplate the truths of eternity and the divine intelligence which directs all things, and to which all things ultimately tend (O'Hear 2001:371).

The point being made by Aristotle is that philosophy is the use of reason for the discovery of eternal truths and values. This faculty of reason of the human person leads to the generation of values that are needed for the realization of the

highest good for the benefit of all humans. In using his/her rational faculty, the human person can realize himself/herself not as a purely material being but also as a spiritual person capable of partaking in the communion between the divine and the human. This interaction of the divine and the human intelligence has been aptly captured in the biblical statement: "Come, let us reason together", our subtitle for this section. This statement from the book of Isaiah may appear a superimposition of the Christian doctrine on all humans, but it has been adopted here to demonstrate that in most theistic religions, the presumption is that there is a rational interaction between the omnipotent creator and the created being. Most importantly, the biblical allusion demonstrates not only the rationality of the divine, but also the fact of the communion between the divine and the human intelligence. This communion, more than anything, confirms the democratic nature of the divine being, which in a way, is a model for the necessity of democratic relations among humans in their social and political organizations. The allusion is thus underlining the fact that, essentially, our rational faculty is an important tool for confronting most of the challenges that we face as humans.

There is no doubt that behind the tribute we pay to modernity today, in respect of the comfort, freedom, secularity and the cluster of democratic values that are present everywhere we turn, lies the idea of rationality. Modernity I like to insist is produced by the philosophical mind and the affirmation of the rational individual. The Cartesian, "*cogito ergo sum*" (I think therefore I am), is the climax of the philosophical dream set in motion by the Socratic injunction: "know thyself". It is the culmination of many years of human cogitation on the divine injunction: "come let us reason together". This has produced a community of academics recently called the philosophers, who initiated the positive revolutionary events of the French confrontation and overthrow of the despotic monarchy, the American transformation of the Hellenic democracy into an idea adaptable to a nation of multiple cultures, the industrial revolution

initiated in England and the Marxist-Leninist revolution of the former Soviet Union. All are products of the dialectical movement of the rational engagement of the human spirit in the imitation of the divine rationality. The denial of this evolutionary process is illogical and fraudulent. My research has been committed, in a nutshell, to the affirmation of this fact that rationality is the royal road to human advancement.

In my career as a researcher in philosophy, I have demonstrated that the challenges facing humanity can only be resolved through the employment of our rational faculty. I have argued persistently that the philosophical discipline cannot be ignored or relegated in this effort. I have maintained that if we do away with the misconception of the philosophical enterprise and regard it for what it is—as the beacon and the vanguard in the human project of using knowledge for transformation and resolution of the human crisis—then the multifarious human problems will be brought under control. But if we refuse and continue to avoid the philosophical perspective in the resolution of our problems, then humanity is heading for perilous times. The implication of this in relation to social and political philosophy is that the rational nature of man clearly demands that only democracy should be the mode of governance that will favour the realization of the good life for all humans.

I commenced my research career, taking as point of departure, the concluding part of my doctoral thesis where I have argued that phenomenological bracketing, which is an epistemological tool for reserving our judgment on epistemic issues until we are able to have the full and total data, can be employed as an idea for dealing with the problems of prejudice and intolerance and failure or absence of democracy in multi-ethnic plural societies (Owolabi 1989). I followed up this research trend, after some early offerings in pure epistemology (Owolabi 1992, 1993-1994, 1995a, and 2004) with most of my effort committed to the project of using philosophical tools to address social problems. In this respect, such problems as intolerance, social and group conflicts,

environmental crisis, public immorality and endemic corruption, failure or absence of democracy and other social malaise were addressed (Owolabi:1993a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1999b, 1999c, 2000a, 2000b, 2003b).

My research in the area of employing philosophical knowledge to resolve social challenges is in two interrelated forms. One group of essays is devoted to the discourse of African crisis, and the other is committed to solving universal human problems, especially as these relate to the predicament resulting from uncontrolled scientific feats generating environmental crises and acting as a threat to social order and peaceful co-existence (Owolabi 1996c, Gbadegesin and Owolabi 2004). Let me first give a synopsis of my research outputs on how to use philosophical tools for resolving “peculiarly African problems” before going to review my research and publications on the issue of the relevance of critical reflection in addressing the lopsided development prevalent in the global society due to mismanagement of the developmental project.

The last three decades of African history have been one of an overwhelming crisis of development. This crisis has been described as the inability of the ideas and inventions devised or adopted by the African society for its daily survival to realize the good life for the society and its people (Owolabi 1996a). The overwhelming nature of the crisis facing the African people during this period, which also persists till today, has necessitated the coinage of the term, “Afro-pessimism”, which is the feeling that Africa is perpetually and eternally destined for underdevelopment, misery and all that are negative. Africa is, therefore, described as “the basket case of the world”. It is seen as a place where nothing good happens. Africa is represented as a society that is intrinsically and naturally destined for servitude and poverty in comparison to other continents of the world. The multidimensional crisis that reached its apogee in the eighties manifests as state illegitimacy, economic depression and social upheavals leading to a breakdown of law and order that generated a

situation of “failed states”—the inability of certain African nation-states to perform their traditional functions (Owolabi 1996c, 2000a). This culminated in the outbreak of civil wars and extermination of a significant number of certain groups. This mass killing has been regarded as genocide or ethnocide as the new word coined precisely for this situation describes it. We have seen this kind of human tragedies in nations like Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone, and especially Somalia (Owolabi 2000a, 2003b).

In many of my writings, I have challenged the position that the crisis situation is natural and intrinsic to the African society. I have maintained that Africa can be out of the wood if the society adopts the critical attitude and do away with the anachronistic ideas and the erroneous but preponderant feeling that the society in all things ought to be different from the West. These two recommendations—an adoption of the critical and philosophical attitude in all our activities in Africa and also changing the erroneous belief that Africa must be different and parallel to the West—need to be examined in detail here because they constitute the kernel of my contribution to philosophical knowledge that is, both as an individual researcher and as a member of a community of philosophy scholars that I have called the “Ibadan School of Philosophy”.

“Ibadan School of Philosophy” is a term that I coined in a recent paper yet to be published. In this work I try to compare the contribution of what I call the “Lagos School of Philosophy” with the position of the “Ibadan School of Philosophy” to the debate on the nature and direction of African philosophy. In that essay, I maintain that after over four decades of the discussion of African philosophy, certain trends are beginning to emerge, and also that while the preponderance of scholars from the University of Lagos tend to argue that Africa’s quest for development should concentrate on the retrospective project of retracing our steps and discovering at what point in the past the African society took the wrong turn in the project of development, majority of the scholars from the University of Ibadan are convinced that the

resolution of the crisis of development depends on how we can be prompt and effective in adopting the values and ethos of philosophy, such as rationality, modernity and democracy, for our contemporary societal needs. Thus, while the members of the "Lagos School of Philosophy" are traditionalists, members of the "Ibadan School" are modernists, according to the categorization of late Professor Olusegun Oladipo (Oladipo 1992 and Owolabi 1993b).

Without necessarily passing judgment on which of the positions is right, one is merely reporting here that though I had all my formal training in philosophy at the University of Lagos, in my work, I subscribe more to the position of the "Ibadan School of Philosophy". The position of the "Ibadan School of Philosophy" has been developed by late Professor Bodunrin, the founding Head of Department of Philosophy at Ibadan (Bodunrin 1981a, 1985a), Professor Kwasi Wiredu, the eminent Ghanaian philosopher who was at one time a member of our Department here in Ibadan (Wiredu 1980) and also the late Professor Olusegun Oladipo (Oladipo 1989, 1992). This position has subsequently been reinforced by the arguments from most of the other members of the Department of Philosophy at Ibadan, including this present inaugural lecturer (Owolabi 1993a, 1993b, 1996b, 1999b, 2001a, 2001b, 2003a).

The argument of the Ibadan school is basically that African Philosophy should be developed not by venerating the culture of the traditional African society—for our historical experiences such as enslavement, colonialism and post-colonial crisis have demonstrated the inglorious nature of our past. Neither should we continue to blame foreign invaders for our predicament, or avoid their culture out of resentment for their past misdeeds. Rather, as for example, Wiredu maintains, the resolution of the African crisis demands that we should subject our traditional culture to critical analysis. We should, he argues, "interpret, clarify, analyse and, where appropriate, and after a critical evaluation, assimilate and develop the resulting body of thought" (Wiredu 1980:1). It is this scholar's firm conviction that the

development of Africa can only be realized if we deliberately jettison certain features of our traditional culture which are detrimental to the development of our society. Features, according to him, like anachronism, authoritarianism and supernaturalism are really attitudes that will prevent the “culture of enquiry” or a “culture of philosophy” that we need for the transformation of the society and the realization of a good life for the African people today.

Olusegun Oladipo in an essay, “Knowledge and the African Renaissance”, has argued forcibly that we need to adopt the “culture of inquiry” in order to put Africa on the path of recovery. In presenting his claim, Oladipo drew a distinction between the “culture of belief” which the African society presently subscribes to, and the “culture of enquiry” that we need to imbibe (Oladipo 1999:7). According to him:

...the culture of inquiry involves systematic investigations of phenomena—natural or social—with a view to enhancing our understanding of their nature. These investigations demand not only systematic observation of things and processes in nature and society, they also involve the use of reason to conceive of possible explanations to what we observe. Thus the culture of inquiry is usually propelled by the pursuit of meaning. It “involves seeking and purposeful effort” aimed at creating a better world (1999:7).

Oladipo’s argument here is that the reason behind our current predicament in Africa is that we subscribe to a “culture of belief” rather than a “culture of inquiry”. It is the adoption of this “culture of belief” as a public culture that has made us incapable of realizing our promise as a people. The “culture of belief” according to him, is the antithesis of the “culture of inquiry”. This “culture of belief” encourages passivity and subservience to the conventional view. It accepts all beliefs as dogmas not to be questioned. In this mode of operation

“supernatural explanations are accepted and operated with. All inherited and received ideas are taken for granted, and ideas, even social practices, are received from other cultures without considering their adequacy for a given human situation, or thrown into new combinations to suit prevailing circumstances” (Oladipo 1999:9). The argument, therefore, is that the cause of our failure to achieve development in Africa is our lack of initiative and dogmatic subscription to ideas that are not well-adapted to our peculiar situation, as a unique and peculiar society. This attitude is noticeable in politics, religion, economics, science and so forth, where we often display a fatalistic attitude to occurrences and situations (Oladipo 1999:9).

The preponderance of the research that I have carried out in relation to the challenge of using philosophical tools to resolve social crisis has followed this modernist position propagated by the “Ibadan School of Philosophy”. I have in fact argued that the adoption of modern values for the realization of the good life is not an option but rather a necessity that we must respond to as responsible scholars, particularly in a situation where our immediate society is already eager and anxious for this new way of life (Owolabi 1995b, 1996b and 2001c). In this regard, for example, I heartily subscribe to the position of an African novelist-philosopher whose essential motif is how to ensure the smooth transition of the Yoruba people to the new culture of modernity. I refer here to Daniel Fagunwa, the legendary Yoruba author of blessed memory, who has maintained that the rational nature of humans, which is universal to all cultures, has been well-developed by the Western culture and, therefore, all the non-Western societies should make a metaphorical effort to attain this “Mount of Thought” (Owolabi 2001a).

But even with this modernist position, I still remain circumspect, in my stance, warning that there are certain aspects of the traditional and indigenous values that we need to retrieve and adapt for meeting our contemporary challenges. For this project, I proceeded to suggest certain

methodological tools to facilitate the retrieval of indigenous ethos (Owolabi 2001b). Similarly, I have warned in some of my writings about the tendency in our bid to acquire modernist ethos, to become involved in a kind of dependency relationship with the Western world (Owolabi 1996b, 2001c). I particularly entertained certain fears about the current process of globalization in the world today regarding which I have argued that we must be critical and selective in the adoption of these new values promoted by the global integration in order to avoid a situation that could lead us in Africa into a relationship of outright dependency, if not enslavement (Owolabi 2001c).

The series of my research writings on the universal problem facing the global society has been essentially on the challenges of science and technology in relation to the problem of environmental sustenance. In this cluster of essays, my argument has been that scientific culture and the outright neglect of the philosophical wisdom to manage the outcome is the reason for the environmental crisis that we are witnessing in the world today. I have argued that various successes of the scientific and technological revolution have been so exciting that the philosophical wisdom necessary for the management of the tension that the scientific values will create in competition with other contending values is ignored (Owolabi 1996c, Gbadegehin and Owolabi 2004, Owolabi and Olu-Owolabi 2009).

Why is there crisis and melancholy of unprecedented dimension in the global society today? Why do we have intermittent wars, conflicts and terrorist activities in the world despite the comforts that the scientific inventions have given to us? It is true that the sciences have done well for mankind, and for this reason, the humanities and in particular, the philosophical discipline is always avoided as unnecessary diversions. But despite the unprecedented innovations of science, despite the very stunning capabilities that the scientific venture has provided for us, war still persists, or rather, is, indeed, on the increase because of the availability of sophisticated weapons of mass destruction made possible by

science and technology. Human beings are still not happy, and the good life remains elusive. Today, there seems to be some nostalgia for the good old days of limited science but abundant happiness. It is thus true that “some questions can indeed be answered in the laboratory, while others cannot. One cannot measure happiness in the laboratory” (Schofield 1972:31). This situation described above and the imperative of the philosophical dimension has been well-explained by Garodia in this manner:

We face today an unprecedented set of problems relating to environment, the coming One World Order and the ongoing process of spiritual decline. We stand at the Abyss, at the steadily approaching threshold of unimaginable chaos, calamity, death and destruction. But there exists a lasting solution to these issues facing humankind. It derives from the notion of power of ideas and an idea so powerful that its effect upon the World will be most profound. And that one idea is to be found only in the unexplored world of philosophy (Garodia 2011:2).

The point we are making, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, is that in our immediate Nigerian society, there is a clutch of crises resulting from the neglect of the philosophical spirit owing to the absence of the philosophical wisdom that should moderate human relations in the society. Africa is a place where chaos seems to reign supreme. In spite of all the global impact of science and technology, we still witness continuing threats of war, economic crises, environmental problems and social unrest. The situation of the global society is that of deep melancholy and want in the midst of plenty.

All these have been happening because of our neglect of philosophy, the foundation of all human knowledge. And where philosophy is not neglected outright, it is completely relegated or deliberately misused so that it does not perform its essential task as the directing influence in the use of reason

and the production of ideas. There is a deliberate disconnect between philosophy and the sciences due to the various innovations given to humanity by the scientific and technological revolution. Banished is the democratic spirit of rational communion between all ideas. The spirit of cooperation and democracy, prevalent in the communion between the human and the divine rationality that allows for an exchange of ideas is similarly outlawed. The operating slogan is no longer “come let us reason together”. The situation now is that science should lead and other disciplines should follow meekly.

With the feats of science in the modern age, scientific enterprise is allowed to have a field day and the philosophical wisdom that ought to be the guiding and directing force is therefore sent out of the arena of performance. It is like a dog sent to provide certain services but brought by the police-guardian, holding its chain and keeping it in check. But once the dog becomes effective in the performance of its task, the guardian is convinced to release the chain; find a place in the audience to sit and grant the dog the leeway to perform. But the dog is now on rampage and the guardian must be brought in to bring the rampaging dog to order. This is the situation of things today. Science is the performing dog; philosophy is the guardian-police. There is the need to bring in the philosophical enterprise with its attendant wisdom to temper the excesses of the sciences.

I Go to Prepare a Place for You

In my Father's house there are many mansions: if it were not so, I would not have told you. I go to prepare a place for you (John 14:2).

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, our discourse is gradually drawing to a close, but before we end, I would like to emphasize, at this point, the main thesis of the lecture. This relates to the fundamental role of philosophy as the progenitor of all academic disciplines about which much has been said

already. We like to state our position as forcibly as we can: it is namely that a neglect of the philosophical discipline by any society is a disregard of the philosophical root of the sciences and the humanities; and such a neglect is tantamount to a gradual but effective destruction of the potency of these many disciplines to help the society realize the "good life". It is because of this foundational role of philosophy that I have selected the above biblical passage as the subtitle of this section. Philosophy, normatively speaking, ought to be the coordinator of the rational enterprise of knowledge production. At a certain period in history, philosophy was given the task of managing this exercise by the society. This was the time when knowledge production got to its maximum, and the society was in a state of order, of the most possible kind. But more often, the philosophical enterprise is challenged and relegated with the sciences taking the front seat and philosophy being denied its coordinating role. At such a moment, society gets into trouble, and knowledge production witnesses a massive decline.

It is true that historically, philosophy is the genesis of all disciplines. Even though, as we have seen all along, this primacy that it used to enjoy seems to have waned considerably for the reasons we have been at pains to highlight earlier on. But it is also an historical fact that the way it is practised today, this foundational role of philosophy is not respected. It is more painful that events in recent times have shown that philosophy is deliberately disconnected from other disciplines. But even at this moment, with the popularity of philosophy at its lowest ebb, the discipline of philosophy still has, in its curriculum, the area devoted to the dialogue between philosophy and the various disciplines. This area has been called the "Philosophy of the Infrastructure of Disciplines". This includes areas such as, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Social Sciences, Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Mathematics, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Economics and the Philosophy of any other kind of emerging disciplines. For

example there is the new "Philosophy of Cybernetics", a new area devoted to the discussion of the philosophical challenges posed by the issues arising from the entire subject of information technology.

The purpose of the "Philosophy of Infrastructure of Disciplines" is to ensure that dialogues exist between philosophy and other disciplines so that the practitioners of those other disciplines remain faithful to the essence of the discipline in its original conception. Let us take, for example, the discipline of Law. Whatever the independence of those who study and practise law, there is the need for them to know the philosophical underpinning of the study of law, just as the philosophical discipline should also be interested in whether Law is still being undertaken according to the normative ideals that generated the enterprise of Law, in the first instance. Philosophy of Law will like to know, for instance, whether or not Law is promoting equity and justice, whether law is opposed to or is in alignment with universal moral standards, and whether the practice of Law and the dispensation of justice are being effected with regard for the natural inclinations and desire of all humans. In a nutshell, Philosophy of Law refers to the general adjudicatory role played on the discipline of Law by the philosophical discipline that is supposed to be the custodian of the essential normative value behind the rational engagement with the idea of Law.

In the same vein, Philosophy of Science is about the dialogue between philosophy and scientific activities. It involves the critical reflection and analysis of the practice of science in order to ensure that certain normative standards of the discipline are sustained. It involves the discussion of the means and end of scientific ventures. It strives to know the nature of the methodology employed by the sciences, the focus and content of the enterprise, whether or not the knowledge being produced is making humans the end or merely a means to an end. It is important for any knowledge production to avoid the temptation of practising its trade with arrogance and self-importance, believing that it is more

important than the humanity that it ought to serve at all times. Philosophy of Science, in a nutshell, is a critical analysis of the entire practice of science, in order to ensure that the activities remain humane, ethical, and the knowledge produced is appropriately designed and executed such that objectivity is maintained at all times, and the knowledge is accessible to all humans.

The point we are making here is that human knowledge in its totality and in spite of the disciplinary divisions ought to be synthesized through a constant dialogue for the purpose of ensuring that the rational enterprise of the discipline is carried out according to human values—especially moral norms—discoverable by the philosophical enterprise, that should constantly guide the practice of these disciplines. The essence of this multidisciplinary engagement is to ensure that the situation of the disciplines conforms to the normative values of philosophy. It is for this reason that Philosophy is considered by Hacker as a “Tribunal of Reason before which scientists and mathematicians may be arraigned for their transgressions” (Hacker 2010: 9).

The philosophical discipline can in fact be likened to a policeman in the knowledge production industry maintaining discipline and order. In this age of disciplinary diversities, the discipline of philosophy should moderate the activities of those disciplines ensuring that they are not working at cross-purposes. It is important that philosophy should be the coordinator, the judicial officer, or rather, the law enforcement officer maintaining law and order and ensuring that the disciplines do not perform below human expectations. As a Philosopher, Jung, says:

My personal view is one that conceives philosophy as a medium of interdisciplinary research. If ideal conditions are provided, philosophy will work as an intellectual catalyst among the academic disciplines, a mediator between the humanities and the sciences. Given proper organization, philosophy works as cement linking the

different areas of scholarly investigation. If philosophers really collaborate with practitioners, they will continue to fulfill a meaningful function in academic life, just as they did one hundred years ago (Jung 2000: 2).

Apart from the philosophical discipline acting as enforcer of standard for other disciplines, it is important that the practitioners of the various disciplines do not lose touch with the philosophical root of their various disciplines. It is expected that after engaging in an academic discipline for years, a practitioner of the discipline should have imbibed certain techniques of philosophy that will enable him/her to be a master of the act of knowledge production. It is assumed that in this tradition of knowledge production, a scientist, or any person in any other academic discipline should be logical, critical and rigorous as to enable him/her to perform his/her research task in a manner conforming to a universal standard prescribed by the philosophical discipline. It is normally expected of any scholar that he demonstrates the philosophical outlook in his/her academic enterprises, especially after undergoing intense and extensive training normally required of a prospective scholar. This is the reason that scholars are granted the degree of "Doctor of Philosophy" at the end of their training, a degree that attests to their acculturation into the tradition of academic research and knowledge dissemination. But to what extent are scholars living up to this expectation? How many scholars of other disciplines are "philosophical" in their practice, how many appreciate the necessity of a consistent dialogue with the trained philosophers, in order to improve their critical and logical skill for the effective act of knowledge production?

The situation today, as we have consistently argued in this lecture is inhospitable to the flourishing of the discipline of philosophy. Policy makers, excited over the success of the scientific and technological disciplines, have completely relegated the philosophical discipline to the background. In the same vein, today's scholars, because of the situation in the

larger society, are not willing to adopt the philosophical values such as should justify their terminal doctoral degrees in Philosophy. They prefer to mimic only the scientific methods. Rather than being regarded as the coordinator of the sciences, philosophy has become their servant, inhabiting the "boy's quarters" in the mansion of ideas. The success of the scientific disciplines has made society confer on the scientists a special status, making them arrogant and disdainful of any other academic activity than science. The outcome of all this is pure unabashed "scientism" in all its ramifications. Today's scientists consider it *infra dig for them* to be involved in a dialogue with philosophers. Consequently the scientists are unwilling, in practising their science, to accept let alone adopt the philosophical tools and values. Thus, the Platonic injunction that "philosophers should become kings or kings should be philosophers" is completely ignored. To return to our biblical allusion, philosophy is no longer capable of "preparing the way" or "a place for" other disciplines. In fact, the situation is such that there is a paradise for the sciences, and there is hardly any place for the philosophical enterprise.

And yet, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, philosophy, because of its history and nature, ought to be in the vanguard of knowledge production and moderate all disciplines in order to ensure that the eternal value of the good life for all is preserved and protected. The ethical challenges facing the contemporary world make it absolutely imperative that philosophy continue to be regarded as of extreme relevance that can only be ignored at society's peril. It is for this reason that the discipline still retains a certain amount of popularity in some circles. Because of the ethical challenges referred to earlier, it behoves every aspect of scholarship to recognize the ethical dimension in its pursuit by responding effectively to the question of how morality can be sustained in the various areas of human operation. It has therefore become popular to talk of such new concepts as, for example, research ethics, environmental ethics, academic ethics, development ethics, and the like.

But what role has the society given the philosophical discipline in respect of these new moral challenges? The reality is that the new ethical subjects are generally being carried out in total exclusion of professionally trained philosophers, the assumption being that ethical issues are general enough to be dealt with by all and sundry. Scholars from other fields operate as if the new ethical issues which they are just stumbling on have not been rigorously discussed in the many centuries of the history of philosophy. Let us cite as an example the now popular: medical ethics. Today, medical doctors are becoming more aware of the problems of ethics in medical practice. They now appreciate that medical practitioners possess certain powers which they can deploy to the detriment of human values and dignity, if certain ethical standards are not formulated and rigorously implemented. Conscious of this fact, medical practitioners are now taking over this task of critically discussing the ethical issues relating to their job. However, rather than do this in collaboration with the philosophers who are, by training more adequately armed with the conceptual and analytical tools necessary for this task, the doctors monopolize the enterprise.

It is true that the subject of medical ethics has been a topical issue in human discourse even before Hippocrates. But the question is: Can this problem be left in the hands of physicians alone? The argument can be made that Hippocrates and the earlier physicians were engaged in the discussion of the ethical implications of their therapeutic activities. But there is incontrovertible evidence in classical history that this discussion was never a monologue, it was, rather, a dialogue between the physicians and the trained philosophers who had the logical and critical tools to make the discourse advance the human interest. Let us even concede that the classical physicians were handling the issue of medical ethics alone. This would be in the tradition of the ancient world where the scholars were not specialists but "jack of all trades". However, it is historically true that those scholars saw themselves more as philosophers than as physicians. It is known that the specialization in the various

areas of knowledge today is due to the extensive knowledge that a scholar may have to acquire to be a specialist in an area of knowledge. How then is it possible for today's medical practitioner, with the enormous amount of knowledge he needs to become a doctor, to have at the same time such adequate knowledge of ethics and the techniques of presenting ethical arguments, as to be able to effectively reflect and proffer effective solutions to the various medical challenges confronting us today?

The point we are making Mr. Vice-Chancellor, is that the imperative of a rigorous discussion of the ethical dimensions of all areas of knowledge demands as a sine qua non, an interactive dialogue between the practitioners of the specialized areas, who have the factual knowledge of the issues and problems in the specific knowledge areas, and the philosopher, who has extensive training in how to apply the critical and logical tools on the problems, in order to attain a higher value for the benefit of humanity. A specific example here is the case of abortion. While the medical doctor can raise the ethical issues and problems involved in the procurement of abortion, he/she still needs to discuss with a trained philosopher the various ontological, metaphysical and epistemological issues regarding the nature of a human person that will enrich the ethical discourse for the objective of attaining the universal human value. From this kind of discourse will come a more robust and profitable analysis. Hence, leaving the discourse of medical ethics to medical doctors alone is like asking a weighing machine to weigh itself or requiring a person to be a judge in his own cause.

At the University of Ibadan, to bring the discussion nearer home, it is unfortunate that all issues of ethics are left in the hands of "non-philosophers". Many ethical documents produced by the University have had little or no input from philosophers. The argument has always been that scholars from other disciplines have at one time or the other taken courses in Ethics. However, does offering two or three elective courses in the subject adjudged adequate to equip anyone with the necessary tools to do a proper analysis of ethical

matters? It is our belief, for instance, that Ethics cannot be adequately handled without a strong background in metaphysics and epistemology. It also cannot be effectively discussed and the problems properly analysed without a firm grounding in logic, coupled with many years of serious work on ethical issues as they arose and developed in the history of philosophy. Asking a person with rudimentary training in Ethics to develop documents on ethical policy is similar to asking a person without any knowledge of anatomy to go to the theatre to perform a surgical operation because he took some elementary courses in surgical tools and how to maintain them. Hence, we can see that it is really pathetic what we have been doing with the subject of Ethics in this country. We professional philosophers have no option but to watch helplessly the way a well-trained obstetrician regards a traditional midwife making frantic efforts to deliver a breech baby with mere incantations. We know that if we, the professionals are summoned in on time, both mother and baby, have a decent chance of being saved. However, the tenet of professional ethics forbids us from forcing ourselves on the society.

We, members of the Department of Philosophy are not resting on our oars despite tribulations and the neglect we have experienced in areas where we feel that our competence is urgently needed. In the year 2000, for example, we procured a Senate Research Grant to pursue a comprehensive study of the problems of ethics in both public and professional operations of the country. The product of the research, a book, will soon be published. Similarly, we were able to propose to the University a professional Master's programme in Professional Ethics which was approved. Over twenty students, at least, graduate from the programme at the end of every session. It also needs to be reported in this lecture that our effort as a Department in the project of using philosophy to address the crisis of development in the society has won for us the support of the Anyiam-Osigwe Foundation which has provided us funds in the past six years to organize series of national and international conferences which have culminated in the publication of three books.

On my own part, I have secured grants twice from the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) to undertake research on Environmental Ethics and Ethics of Education, culminating in the publication of a monograph and a chapter in a book (Owolabi 1996a, and 2000b). Apart from these, I have also been awarded a number of grants by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) for research into many dimensions of the prevailing social crises in Africa. The most recent of such benefactions from this organization is a grant to organize a national working group for the study of corruption and public morality in Nigeria.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, the point that I am making is that as a member of the Department of Philosophy of this University and also as a researcher in Philosophy, I am aware of my responsibility and that of my discipline to always help to prepare a way for other disciplines. As an individual and as a member of the Philosophy Department, I have been faithful to this mission despite the travails and tribulations of our discipline. We, philosophers in the Department of Philosophy of this University are constantly leading the way and showing the path to other disciplines despite the less than appreciative attitude of the society. Our fervent hope is that the other disciplines in the University would realize that there is need for constant interaction and cross-fertilization of ideas to be moderated by the philosophical discipline in order for us to be able to realize our promise as academics. We recognize that:

...the function of philosophical teachings is clear—to mediate between the specialist and the nation, in order to break the barrier between knowledge and need; to find new truth and express it in simpler terms so that all literate people might understand; and to stop the process of moral nihilism where morality is seen as mere human construct and therefore completely arbitrary and mutable (Garodia 2011).

Conclusion

Be of Good Cheer I Have Conquered the World

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer; I have conquered the world (John 16:33).

We like to conclude this exercise on an optimistic note. For this, we are relying again on the Bible for our inspiration. Our situation as practitioners of the philosophical trade has not been an easy one. Hence, the story of my academic career has been the story of trials and tribulations, but we shall, nevertheless, conquer the world. To the new student of Philosophy who is rendered despondent by family and friends asking the embarrassing question: “*Philo kini?*”; to the Philosophy graduate who could not get a job and has been told by his last hope for employment that studying Philosophy-Psychology is a “double jeopardy”; to all who make effort in the face of adversity to employ philosophical tools to resolve the numerous problems in the society and who are yet unappreciated or indeed treated with disdain; to all those people who are genuine lovers of wisdom, who do not look for an easy way out, but work conscientiously to ensure that the advancement of humanity is realized through the use of philosophy—to all these there is the need for reassurance in their various preoccupation that, all will be well.

This lecture has sought to argue that the reason why there are many problems in the world today is because the human race has shunned the philosophical approach and embraced only immediate, material and empirical solutions. Let us begin from our country Nigeria where there is a breakdown of public morality and trust. Where all our infrastructures have collapsed; where a culture of unjustified affluence reigns supreme, and people desire to reap where they did not sow—a country where violence have become the norm and great intolerance and group conflicts rather than social order has become the order of the day. Is there no need for a deep reflection on this matter; a well-informed interrogation of the

situation in order to discover the root cause of this social disorder in its diverse manifestations?

And what about the continent of Africa as a whole? Africa has been described as the basket case of the world; a continent that is in a free fall with her people heading for extinction. Africa's recent history is one of a continent of corrupt and despotic leadership; a continent of misery, want and pandemic diseases; where the various polities cannot be properly organized, and many states are collapsing owing to their inability to sustain a democratic mode of governance. Africa has become a continent where a daily struggle for existence and survival is constantly being negotiated. Africa is a continent where groups are pitted against one another, and the overpowered groups are under the threat of annihilation.

The global society is also on the verge of a precipice. Even the developed countries of the world are witnessing the threat of an implosion resulting from the social crisis produced by extreme capitalism and its attendant value of the celebration of individual autonomy. Those countries have completely lost the spirit of community that always ensures the realization of the common good. The excessive exploration of nature due to the uncontrolled capacity of science and technology has made environmental crisis a global problem. Development in these advanced countries of the world has been described as lopsided and unsustainable. Climatic change and the instability of the environment have become a threat to the survival and good living of people, even in the Northern hemisphere where we have the so-called developed nations.

Politically, the end of the cold war or the so-called end of history has not brought about the cessation of violent conflicts, rather it has witnessed the break-down of international order as a result of what Samuel Huntington calls the clash of civilizations. The violent invasion of America, Britain, Spain and other Western countries by the so-called terrorist groups commenced the reign of terror in the world, with the fear of dastard attacks seriously threatening global peace.

All these signs of impending perilous times are products of our unexamined living, and they highlight the fact that science and technology may produce innovations and inventions that may make life more comfortable, but the good life, an ideal that philosophers have sought since time immemorial, can only be realized by constant rigorous and critical reflections. This is the thesis of this discourse. In short, the argument that we have been making all along in this lecture can be brought to a close now by raising certain posers in respect of the crises facing Nigeria, Africa and the world in general. After all—and we already have made the point—philosophers operate by posing questions. We are therefore concluding by asking the following questions:

In respect of the Nigerian society:

- (i) Why did the policy makers refuse to have a foundational course like philosophy in the curriculum of the University of Ibadan when it was established in 1948, whereas the sister university, University of Legon in Ghana, commenced with a Department of Philosophy?
- (ii) Why is it that in the French-speaking countries of the world philosophy is taught at the upper secondary school level, at the stage of baccalaureate and most of the potential entrants into the university will thus have an elementary training in philosophy and this opportunity is not available in Nigeria? Why is there no opportunity for high school students coming to study the humanities in the university to be exposed to the study of logic and critical thinking, especially those of them who are not quantitatively gifted and will not take a course in mathematics?
- (iii) Why is it that only two universities in the whole of the Northern part of the country offer courses in Philosophy, and even the long-established universities like Ahmadu Bello University, Universities of Jos and Maiduguri do not have Departments of Philosophy and, by implication, their students denied any training in philosophy?

- (iv) Why is it that Oxford and Cambridge universities, the two leading universities in the United Kingdom, have Faculties of Philosophy with many lecturers as members of the faculty and many courses offered in combination with Philosophy, whereas Departments of Philosophy in Nigeria are daily struggling to survive under the threat of rationalization?

In relation to the African society, these questions can be posed:

- (i) Why is it that our first generation of leaders with limited opportunity for education during the colonial period gave serious attention to the development of ideas, and some of them like Azikiwe, Awolowo, Nasser, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghor, Toure and others became established philosophers in their own right with ideas produced by them challenging the philosophical positions of the giants in Classical Philosophy and our contemporary leaders do not show any respect for philosophical ideas?
- (ii) Why is it that in our African universities serious theoretical ideas are not being initiated today as it used to be the case in the early days of post-independence history where theoretical ideas emerged from universities like Ibadan, Legon, Dar es Salam and Makerere? Why is it that today our academe in Africa only provides descriptive work serving as raw data to be processed for deep theoretical analysis by the universities in the North?
- (iii) Why is it that in Africa today we do not have donor agencies interested in theoretical research that can fund the various necessary reflective researches about the reason for the numerous crises in the country? Why is it that African nation-states are not thinking of establishing multinational research institutes committed to the critical analysis of the foundational problems of the African people?

And finally in relation to the global society:

- (i) Why is it that the global community, particularly the developed countries and the international organizations, are devoting and committing attention to the need for scientific advancement, and corollary support is not given to the issue of values and its basis as a factor in conflict generation?
- (ii) Why is it that the various international responses to the environmental crisis are not proactive? Why is it that only the scientific dimension to the crisis is emphasized, and attention is not given to the cultural dimensions of the problem which only philosophical and humanistic studies can address?
- (iii) Why is it that it is not important to the United Nations to establish an institute for the discourse of the interaction between the sciences and the humanities to be moderated by the trained philosophers for the purpose of addressing the problem of an inhumane scientific research and, most especially, for the objective of critically reflecting on the ethical challenges posed by every scientific venture or invention?

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, it has become conventional in this University for inaugural lectures to end with recommendations and suggestions. But this convention shall be breached in this present lecture. This is because my discipline of Philosophy constantly strives to avoid the temptation of making suggestions, for when recommendations are made to an individual or group, you are likely going to prevent them from being critical and innovative; you will make them incapable of discovering the solution to their problems themselves. The second reason is that when people demand recommendations from philosophers, they do this not with the genuine motive of getting result, but for the simple reason of demonstrating that the philosopher is not capable of any extraordinary wisdom. Such demands for recommendation

are more often than not a ploy to humiliate the philosopher if he/she does not quickly discern the motive. A story has been told of two children willing to prove that a philosopher in their community did not know all things contrary to the general belief of the community. The children, so the story goes, came to the philosopher with a bird hidden at their back. They asked the philosopher whether the bird was still living or dead. Sensing their motive, the philosopher paused a bit, to reflect. If he said the bird was living they would promptly strangle it and proclaim the philosopher unfit of his name. If he says the bird is dead they will allow it to fly away, also demonstrating the limited wisdom of the philosopher. The philosopher, therefore, responded philosophically by saying: "As for the life of that bird, it is in your hands". Mr. Vice-Chancellor, like that philosopher of old, I am avoiding any recommendation, I only say, in concluding this lecture, that, as for the future of humanity, it is in the hands of all of us who are in the academe, who will like to be regarded by future generations as "philosophers", whether we have any formal training in philosophy or not.

Let me stop the way I end all my lectures, by saying in the philosophical spirit: "*Salve, Ceasar, morituri te salutamus*" (Hail Ceasar, those of us who are about to die salute you).

Thank you for your attention and may God continue to bless you all.

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BIODATA OF PROFESSOR KOLAWOLE ADEREMI OLU-OWOLABI

Professor Kolawole Aderemi Olu-Owolabi was born on the 30th of May 1961 at Ikenne-Remo, Ogun State to Chief Ezekiel Oludunni Owolabi of Igbogila, Yewa North Local Government of Ogun State and Mrs. Jarinat Rachel Ajoke Owolabi of Ayetoro, Yewa North Local Government of Ogun State. He had his primary education at Ansar-ud-Deen Primary School, Oke Ado, Ibadan. His secondary education was at St. Patrick's Grammar School, Ibadan, where he obtained his School Certificate in 1978. He thereafter proceeded to Comprehensive High School, Ayetoro, for his Higher School Certificate, which he obtained in 1980. The same year, he was admitted to the University of Lagos, for a degree in Philosophy. At the end of his first year, he won the prestigious Federal Government Merit Award Scholarship for being the best student in his class. He graduated in 1983 with a Second Class Upper Division, winning the Departmental Prize as the best student in his class. He was retained at the Department of Philosophy of his University, for his National Youth Service. He commenced his doctorate programme in September of 1984, while he was also employed as a graduate assistant, to teach in the Department. He defended his Ph.D thesis on the 9th May 1989, becoming the first person in the history of the Department to do so.

Professor Olu-Owolabi joined the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, on the 5th of October 1989, as a Lecturer Grade II. He was promoted to the position of Lecturer Grade I in 1993, Senior Lecturer in 1996 and Professor in 2002. Professor Olu-Owolabi served as the Acting Head of Department of Philosophy of the University between 2002 and 2004. He also obtained the LL.B. Honours degree, with a Second Class Upper Division from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. He was called to the Nigerian Bar as a Solicitor and Advocate of the Supreme Court of Nigeria in 2007. During his sabbatical leave in the 2008-2009

session, he obtained an LL.M degree, with distinction from the same Obafemi Awolowo University.

Professor Olu-Owolabi is a member of the Nigerian Philosophical Association (N.P.A), Nigerian Bar Association (N.B.A.), Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Fellow of the Institute of United States Studies (IFUSS) Iowa University, Iowa City. He has won many academic fellowships, which include Rockefeller Fellowship for American Studies, at the University of Iowa, Iowa in 1999, CODESRIA Governance Institute 1999, British Council Travel Grant 1998, French Institute for Research in Africa, 1996 and 2000 and CODESRIA National Working Group grant, 2010-2012.

Professor Olu-Owolabi has been an external examiner and assessor of Ph.D and professorial promotions to the following universities; University of Lagos, Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Olabisi Onabajo University, Ago-Iwoye, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko. He was at one time part time or visiting lecturer at Olabisi Onabajo University, Ago-Iwoye, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru-Jos, University of Iowa, Iowa-City, United States. He was also a Resource Person to the CODESRIA Governance Institute in 2006. He has attended international conferences in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Malaysia, Mozambique, Senegal, South-Africa, United Kingdom and the United States. Professor Olu-Owolabi has supervised over sixty Master's students, 10 Ph.D graduates, both within his Department and at the Peace and Conflict Programme of the Institute of African Studies. He has over sixty publications in reputable outlets. Professor Olu-Owolabi is presently the Dean, Faculty of Arts. He is married and blessed with children.