

Towards a Philosophy with Meaning and Significance for Africa

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Abstract: The essay explores the various meanings of philosophy. After a consideration of its different meanings, it outlines the possible uses of philosophy. Philosophy of course deals with fundamental questions. These questions are not radically detached from issues of real life. Moreover, it is up to us to shape philosophy in ways it could enlighten our existence and continuity. As philosophy does not subscribe to just one method, using philosophical analysis and reflection and review of relevant literature, I have tried to show the importance of making philosophy relevant to its context. Here there is a plea to make philosophy intercultural because interculturality will enable the broadening of the philosophical horizon, thereby creating a condition for addressing issues of human survival and flourishing through philosophy enriched by an intercultural dialogue/polylogue. We need to do philosophy for a purpose. That purpose must not be for a mere academic exercise alone. It has to be a “critical moral practice” that tries to use philosophy to address problems that are close to peoples’ concerns about a meaningful and fulfilling life. Based on the discussion given, I have concluded the article showing ways of practicing philosophy with meaning and significance.

Keywords: Dialogue/polylogue; Human survival and flourishing; Interculturality; Philosophy

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1. Introduction

Philosophy is a discipline that deals with important questions of existence, knowledge and values. It deals with these points by trying to provide the most general principles and guidelines for life. Philosophy is pluralistic and is so due to the fact that all philosophies emerge in specific contexts and primarily try to answer questions that are crucial in their contexts. We can view philosophies as responses to the questions and problems that given societies encounter at particular moments. While they may be direct or indirect responses to problems encountered, the responses do not appear in a vacuum or are not from the blues. There are/were previously available philosophies, cultures, experiences and generally knowledge of different kinds that constitute the background of such philosophies. One may try to come up with new ideas or even philosophy, but one cannot be free from previous philosophies, experiences and even prejudices of the past.

There is a lot of accumulated philosophical knowledge in the world. Such knowledge is of different kinds. We find, for example, ethnocentric philosophy/knowledge that wants to spread the “ethnocentric truth” as universal to all corners of the world. This is done at the expense of the others’ knowledge and experiences. This is not appropriate and helpful. On the other hand, there are philosophies that recognize their limited perspective and want to broaden it through reciprocal encounters with other philosophies. Philosophies can and have to be evaluated in the way they try to give meaning to life. From a vast corpus of philosophies that humankind has produced so far, we have to be able to differentiate between the ones that focus on mere abstraction and the spread of ethnocentric ideas by shutting the door on perspectives outside of them and those that recognize the limitation of every philosophical perspective and try to overcome such limitation through dialogue, cooperation and a readiness to know what is outside of one’s own perspective. That is the message of this essay. The practice of philosophy has to address the point regarding the meaning and significance of philosophy that we practice. In the situation in which we are, does the philosophy which is part of our education and research relate to the lives of our people/our community? Do our philosophers discuss the problems that are of concern to our community raising philosophical questions regarding freedom, social justice, governance, the goal and content of education, the environment and similar important concerns of our communities and humankind at large?

By discussing only others’ philosophical texts that hardly relate to our situation we cannot pretend to do philosophy properly. We cannot also claim that it is not the task of philosophy to be concerned with real lives of people like freedom, poverty, justice and the like. Philosophy cannot leave such issues to economics, political science, sociology or social work alone. As the form of knowledge that is able to produce the most general principles as guides to life, it can contribute by laying the general framework within which questions of justice, equality, development and other important issues can be addressed. That is what I mean, when I say philosophy with meaning and significance for us. We can claim that we are doing philosophy with meaning and significance, when we are able to practice philosophy that does not shy away from our real problems of freedom, justice, equality, poverty, environmental problems, proper education for our young generation and many more.

2. Research Methods

This is an article based on philosophical analysis and reflection. As philosophy may not use a specific method this essay/article is a product of reflections based on long years of teaching and research based on interactions with students, colleagues and readings of different philosophical sources. It is meant to shed some light on the question of the relevance of philosophical education. I have consulted lots of books and journal articles in writing this essay. By approaching these sources critically, I have tried to make a case for a philosophy with meaning and significance for us.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. What is Philosophy?

As we all know, there are different ways of understanding philosophy. Originally depending on its etymology, it was/is understood as a love of wisdom, knowledge and truth. Taking its history and nature, philosophy is also known as the queen of the sciences, particularly in view of the questions that it raised and the role it played in the evolution and development of knowledge/sciences.

While it deals with the general questions of metaphysics, epistemology, and values and attempts to critically and rationally tackle the questions raised, many have very often questioned its utility. Just as people did not espouse the same opinion on the nature of philosophy, they also were not able to agree on its utility.

Russell (1997) did not so much talk about its instrumentality while he underlined the importance of philosophy in broadening our horizon when he said,

Philosophy is to be studied not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers, can as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves, because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes the highest good (xvii-xviii).

It appears that Karl Marx's 11th *Theses on Feuerbach* significantly differs from that of Russell, since Marx gave philosophy the task of changing the world. In this thesis Marx (1976: 15) stated that "The philosophers have interpreted the world in many ways, the point, however, is to change it".

Incidentally, it is with this in mind and the kind of tasks that Marxism gives to philosophy that many committed horrendous crimes on millions of people with the view of building socialist societies. Without involving in the debates of whether all those who claimed to be Marxists were really Marxists or not, we can say that the likes of J. Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Ze Dong and others killed millions in the name of Marxist Socialism which has its roots among others in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. Such deeds of course should not be seen as undermining the call for making knowledge of whatever sort relevant because the horrendous activities could have come about from an inappropriate use of knowledge.

The basic idea that arises when these issues are raised on the nature and tasks of philosophy, is that both its nature and tasks are contested, points that in no way undermine both the nature and tasks of philosophy. Reason is central to philosophy. The important tool that philosophy has to answer its fundamental questions is reason and the question of what reason is and whether it is a universal trait of all humans has been a contentious issue among many philosophers. According to Ramose (2017: 2),

Reason is present wherever there are human beings. In deed the ubiquitous presence of reason among human beings on planet earth has been and continues to be doubted by some who insist that reason is the special preserve of only one segment of human beings. Despite this unsustainable doubt, reason prompts human beings across the planet earth to pose questions arising from their being situated in a particular place at a given time. Answers to the questions posed need not be identical because the experience of being-in-the-world as human beings is neither identical nor the same.

In those lines, Ramose raises important points. The nature of philosophy is contested or we can't just agree on one meaning of philosophy, merely because it is based on the experiences of those who want to express their views vis-à-vis the problems they encounter in the place and during the time when they were forced, induced, and motivated to think philosophically. In other words, the expression philosophy is the self-consciousness of a culture precisely underlines why the meaning and use of philosophy is contested. It also tries to address the issue of its utility which can be drawn from the nature of the philosophy itself.

Despite the fact that the meaning and utility of philosophy continue to be a matter of contestation, it is possible to agree on a few points as to its meaning and significance. It is vital to understand that as the self-consciousness of a culture the questions that philosophy raises are important both from theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, philosophy gives the spectacle with which we

can view reality, knowledge, values etc. It does this by employing reason in a critical way. It, as much as possible tries to avoid non-rational/irrational explanations and gives us knowledge with which we can understand our very being in the world and the world itself.

Practically, owing to the fact that it raises important questions regarding values like moral, aesthetical and the questions of 'how we should live' it has the capacity to equip us with tools with which we could evaluate our lives and actions. Most basically practically philosophy raises the question of how we should live our lives. The question of how we should live has been addressed by many people including religious people and other areas of intellectual activity. That of philosophy is important in that it gives us the opportunity to decide on the type of life we should live by following principles that have been sanctioned by an understanding that we consider right, good and uphold the principles of justice. It is the task of philosophy to tell us that we should follow philosophical principles that are important and enhance human survival and flourishing. This point is closely linked with the point I just raised about the principles of justice. Can we think of human survival and flourishing without the principles of justice? It is, therefore, important to engage philosophically in order to come to grips with these ideas: What type of philosophy is it that enables us to do this?

The question of how we should live has been a very important question for many philosophies. The opinion we have about how we should live directly or indirectly emanates from the way we understand life and the world itself. How do we understand the world? What kind of values do we give to human life and the environment that sustains life? What type of values do we cherish with regards to humans and the environment without which life cannot survive? The way a given philosophy answers these questions is important in answering the questions of how we should live our lives. While it is true that all philosophies try to handle the fundamental questions of philosophy critically, it is also important to note that not all philosophies give the same focus to problems of today that require philosophical attention/intervention. We know today that the world is more interconnected than ever before. The interconnectedness calls for an intercultural critical questioning and a collective search for meaning. There seems to be a loss of direction among scholars, leaders and many concerned individuals and bodies as to how the problems encountered can be solved/handled. Thinking is the key instrument we have to tackle the problems. But more importantly it is a critical, intercultural thinking that is able to better understand this situation. We should engage philosophy in the understanding and guidance of the principles that guarantee social justice and thereby lead to peace since peace at all levels cannot be maintained without justice. If the power of philosophy lies in words, the words have to be thought of or better still crafted in an intercultural way to have the full power of philosophy.

Philosophy as a rational reflection on humans, society and nature has a big potential of contributing to making human life more humane and just. The power of philosophy is the power of its words crafted in a logical, rational and just way. We have to, of course make a distinction between philosophy *per se* and a philosophical practice which is neither prescriptive and speculative but critical questioning or "critical moral practice" (Kieos, 2001) on the human condition that tries to give meaning to life and action in an interconnected and complex world.

Philosophy is able to do this because of its use of public reason that requires that our moral and political principles be justifiable and reasonably acceptable to all those to whom the principles are supposed to apply. Doing philosophy interculturally is not only important but must be the genuine way in which philosophy should be done. What necessitates this is the fact that philosophy is based on experience. Any philosophy has hardly the possibility to see beyond its cultural horizon unless it engages in an intercultural dialogue. Such an approach is important for any philosophy because it enables it to enrich itself through philosophical ideas appropriated from perspectives that are outside itself. It is well known that philosophy aspires for the universal, while it emanates and functions in particular circumstances. The question is how can such an aspiration be met? It cannot be met by a mere claim that we make from our own vantage points. Philosophy must realize that it is not able to produce knowledge that understands the world in its totality. The knowledge of the world is very

much more than what a philosophy based on the experiences of a specific culture can produce. This requires broadening the horizon of philosophy. Broadening the horizon of philosophy means creating the conditions for different philosophies to enter into dialogue/polylogue with the goal of enhancing understanding based on different philosophies, methodologies and epistemologies. Here it may be necessary to remember the words of Wimmer (2002: 33) who said that, “Wherever possible look for transcultural overlappings of philosophical concepts and theories, since it is possible that well-founded theories have developed in more than one cultural tradition”.

Today when we want to be up to the challenges of the 21st century, we have to be able to tap into the wisdom of as many philosophies and/or cultures as possible. Broadening the horizon of philosophy and trying to tap into the wisdom of many cultures individually and collectively broadens our alternatives since it effects reciprocal enrichment. If the opposite were to happen, we could not go outside of our own horizons. Broadening the horizon of philosophy can be taken as a means to overcome the limitations imposed up on us by our own experiences and perspectives.

Again, Wimmer (2000: 8) says,

There are good reasons to hold that philosophy today and in the future will have serious shortcomings if it continues to discuss global questions only within the framework of concepts and methods derived from Occidental lore. If philosophy will not be able to surpass its [Occidentalism] by going forward to a true globalization, it will fail to give answers to humankind in the future. So there are reasons to accept the view that philosophy in a general sense has several – and perhaps many origins.

The one reason, therefore, that necessitates doing philosophy interculturally is the limitation of perspectives. Beyond the limitation of perspective of course the issue of transcultural overlappings is an important one that tells us that no philosophy or culture is pure. All cultures as Mall (2002) says should not be thought of as windowless monads. Philosophies and cultures have evolved through the give and take ethos spanning centuries or even millennia.

The proper way to understand a philosophy is not to think of it as a pure X or Y philosophy, but as a philosophy that evolved through intercultural encounters. It is actually not correct to think of any philosophy as a pure X or Y philosophy since this denies its relations to and appropriations from others.

There is another important point that follows from this. Western philosophy claimed universality in an inappropriate way assuming that it is the only philosophy that has been able to produce a total knowledge and therefore can speak on behalf of humanity. That is what can be seen, when one takes into account the ambitious and grand narratives of European philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Marx and so on. They were these ambitious narratives that they produced regarding history, culture, freedom, emancipation, etc. that drew severe criticism from postmodernists. It was/is not right for them to assume that their knowledge of the world is tantamount to the knowledge of humanity. It was/is not right to assume the God’s perspective for people who have operated with limited experience. Truth became/has become the victim of the globalization of their limited Western experience.

Another not less important point is, even with this limited perspective, they were/are not in a position to practically support what they have preached in theory. Mungwini (2017: 5-6) said,

European modernity and Enlightenment touted precious ideals like the dignity of the person and democracy to the world, while at the same time it remained so intimately and inextricably implicated in slavery and the colonial projects. The paradox here is the discrepancy between ‘sterling rhetoric and lived reality or glowing principles and actual practice.

We need to distinguish between the rhetoric of philosophy and its practice, to distinguish between the great hope it generates and its achievements. Probably one of the reasons why its meaning and utility are in contestation could be because of this. Is it not a hypocrisy when a philosopher talks about freedom with enthusiasm, but participates in denigrating humans or produces ideas with which people who have power oppress, denigrate and rule over others?

It is necessary for philosophy to be dialogical, intercultural and also realize that reason prompts human beings across planet earth to pose questions. The vantage point from which philosophical

questions are raised is crucial. The purpose for which reason is used also is crucial. Are we using reason to contribute to human wellbeing and flourishing or for the opposite purpose?

This is closely connected with the type of philosophy that we practice. This is also concerned with the purpose why we do philosophy. Socrates engaged himself with philosophical dialogue with a purpose. If we engage ourselves with philosophical issues and do philosophy for the purpose of human flourishing, then this is the right approach to philosophy.

This can be seen in the kind of questions that we raise and the philosophical principles and ideals that we promote. What are the legitimate subjects of philosophy? Do we really need to deal with abstract philosophical questions alone or can we understand philosophy in such a way that it can have meaning and utility for us? What are the proper subjects of philosophical enquiry?

We can start to answer these questions by referring to the point that we raised earlier on, namely that philosophy depends on experience. It should be the task of philosophy to try to answer questions posed by our existential situation. We appreciate European philosophy and acknowledge its contribution for the place philosophy has in the world today. But we should also realize that in a situation of our predicament we cannot keep on limiting our philosophical discourse, i. e. research and teaching to those topics alone. Is not the purpose of education to appropriate what we have learnt in a manner that is relevant to our situation? For us the important philosophical questions should primarily be the ones that affect the lives of our people. The issues of governance, poverty, rights, freedom, social justice, the environment and many more are important issues that require the attention of philosophy and philosophers. We need to approach these and other philosophical problems drawing on our philosophical education and our own indigenous wisdom and philosophy.

We have a variety of indigenous philosophy and wisdom that is useful for us and humanity at large. We have philosophies that give a pride of place to human wellbeing and advocate harmony between humans and nature. We also have political philosophies, cultural values and indigenous wisdom and sagacity that can enhance human survival and flourishing without damaging the environment vital for survival.

At this point, I may mention the concept of African philosophy that is not new for us. We can say that African philosophy has been necessitated by the African condition. It became an African soul-searching project in its various manifestations. Its search for identity on the one hand and its struggle against philosophies that claim reason for a limited segment of humanity shaped the nature of African philosophy. It has proliferated as a dialogical project that has been fighting for its rightful place among the philosophies of humankind.

The crucial point in this regard is that Africans, or any other group of people for that matter, should accord special significance to the particularity of their history as a people. Philosophy is grounded in human experiences, and experiences are always bound to time and place. The human ability to apprehend different realities differently is at the center of the whole question surrounding the quest for identity in philosophy. As Mungwini (2017: 7) says, "To ignore the cultural location and historical exigencies out of which philosophers arise is to pay lip service to the very idea and meaning of philosophy". Africans take dialogue as a crucial instrument in the search for truth and historical justice. The search for social justice is one of the tasks of African philosophy and the works dealing with this relationship have largely focused on this. African philosophy should be at the service of humanity in search of social justice and over all human wellbeing and flourishing. African philosophy is a philosophy born of struggle. It is a philosophy born of rage and humiliation because on the one hand European scholars of different fields of knowledge had largely denigrating discourses on Africa and Africans, while the colonial project implemented what the scholars did. That is why it is preoccupied with self-inventory, the search for identity and the attainment of epistemic justice that can lead to social justice and other forms of justice.

We have philosophies that accord priority to human survival, flourishing and harmony. We have to be able to define and redefine our relations with each other based on the conceptions that we have about human beings. We have to approach philosophies from an intercultural perspective to

understand human values and relations. Africa has to be able to use philosophy to understand its situation and overcome its predicament.

Our philosophy has to go a long way in order to establish a notion of social justice that could be a foundation for our relations with each other. One of the main reasons for conflicts locally, regionally and globally is the absence of justice. Philosophy should be concerned with how justice and harmony could be established between us. Without the establishment of that, we cannot even expect to survive let alone grow and transform. That is where philosophy should try to contribute drawing from local wisdom and philosophy and also appropriating from external sources. The establishment of a notion of justice that could be acceptable to many if not all is one of the tasks of philosophy. Such an understanding of justice can evolve through an intercultural and intracultural dialogue or polylogue. For this, the education of young people in philosophy drawn from local and international sources, and focusing on survival ethics, rights in their various manifestations, justice, democracy, peace, the environment and other important points is indispensable. Indeed, they are young people with a proper education and in fact philosophical education that has meaning and use to us and embrace the ideas mentioned above that can guarantee human survival and flourishing.

In matters of how we should live our lives we can look into African sources more than other sources, without of course being isolationist or ignoring non-African sources. I say this when I think of the values that we can draw from the Egyptian idea of *Maat*, *Ubuntu*, the ideas of many African sages and the Oromo concept of *Nagaa* and *Safuu* (Gutema, 2021; Ramose, 2002; Verharen, 2006, 2012). These are just a few examples that put emphasis on harmony, humanity, peace and moral codes emanating from those concepts. The role such concepts play in these communities is important and we can learn how they enabled the communities to thrive in peace and harmony following an order that is supposed to guide relations between humans and other things that share the earth with humans. We have to give an important role to philosophical education along other areas of knowledge. Philosophical education that is able to focus on what is relevant and has meaning for us play a significant role in shaping the youth to be guided by moral principles and ideals that respect human life, human rights, a harmonious life with each other and the environment in its totality in view of its indispensability for survival and flourishing. It should be an intercultural one.

Students of philosophy should not shy away from sensitive social, economic and political ideas assuming that this is not for philosophers. For this purpose, drawing from the kind of indigenous wisdom and philosophy also is helpful. Philosophers have a broader perspective than economists, politicians and others in view of the knowledge that philosophy gives them and this could be at its best when enriched interculturally. They should be concerned with the content of the education. It should be an intercultural one that consists of all relevant philosophical content: African, European, Asian, Latin American, etc. They should also work towards making such knowledge available to young persons both in formal and informal means of educating the youth. They should further contribute in tackling social, economic, political, environmental and other problems. Most importantly, they should think of philosophy as “a critical moral practice” (Kiros 2001) that uses philosophy to enlighten areas where there are problems.

One of the ways in which philosophy could have meaning and be of use to communities is by discussing problems that are at the heart and minds of communities and trying to solve them based on knowledge (Verharen *et al.*, 2014). There are long held views that philosophy does not have a lot to do with real life. The often-cited statement emanating probably from the West is that “philosophy does not bake bread”. There are views expressed by people like Russell (1997) who believed that philosophy is important not so much for its answers, but because of its questions as a result of the abilities that they generate in terms of enabling us to come to grips with the puzzles of life. Based on this and similar utterances quite a good number of people assume that philosophy may not have significance in real life.

In the first place, Russell’s position that philosophy is important for the breadth of thought that it gives us shows the importance philosophy could have not only in understanding our problems but also

suggesting solutions. Even when understood in the sense that Russell (1997) said, the significance of philosophy cannot be undermined. It is necessary to critically evaluate assumptions and assertions that would like to keep philosophy in the ivory tower, because it is in this way that many have tried to keep philosophy away from the real concerns of life. There are branches of practical philosophy like ethics, aesthetics, etc. that are concerned with real problems. Philosophical areas of second order inquiry like political philosophy, philosophy of law, philosophy of education, and so on are concerned with normative issues of a morally right and acceptable social and political dispensation that are important in the lives of many.

It is also possible to follow Nzamujo (2017) who used philosophy along with other forms of knowledge to solve the real problems of society as it was seen in Benin and then adapted by a number of communities in different African countries. The interesting thing about his works is that in addition to his education in philosophy and religion, he further studied mathematics, computer systems, development economics and microbiology.

His main achievement was that he developed what he called the Songhai center. He worked out a development model that is useful for poor rural communities. His experiment started on the outskirts of Porto Novo, the capital of Benin, where he was able to reclaim the fertility of degraded land given to him by the government. He used agro-ecology, microbiology and biomimicry for making the land productive again. He developed appropriate sustainable technologies based on a holistic agro-ecological ecosystem which combines the fields of ethics, information and communications technology and other forms of relevant knowledge in the natural, social and engineering sciences (Nzamujo, 2017 and 2018).

This constitutes a good example of how philosophy and other forms of knowledge can be used to change the livelihood of poor people whose basic human rights have been denied by their governments in that their needs of food, clothing and shelter have not been fulfilled. If these people's basic needs are fulfilled then there is no doubt that they will raise the other demands concerned with rights, freedom, political participation and so on.

In any case, the avenue for the intervention through knowledge to change people's lives for the better is multiple. We can produce knowledge and/or use existing knowledge (science, philosophy, engineering, etc.) to make people's lives better. The important point, however, is that we understand the purpose of education and particularly university education that has to realize its ethical responsibilities of serving the community that hosts it. One of the main tasks of any university should be to try to solve the problems of their communities by producing knowledge that solves their problems.

This can be a good example of how knowledge can be used to change peoples' lives. There are also other areas where knowledge can be deployed creatively to tackle society's problems. One of the main problems of African countries and/or governments is that of governance. As we all know African postcolonial governance is in deep trouble due to a variety of reasons mainly among which is the inability of Africa's elite to establish a leadership acceptable by the people of Africa. Many countries have attempted to own the political systems of the erstwhile colonial countries. But, this has not taken Africa anywhere. It does not either work for us at all or we haven't been able to use it properly. Is there any African country that since the onset of decolonization in the late 1950s that has been able to establish a properly functioning democratic system? Following the last wave of so-called democratization process after the end of the cold war and the demise of Apartheid in South Africa in the early 1990s, there are only a few countries that seem to have embarked on a promising democratic path.

Apart from Ghana, South Africa, Botswana, Senegal and may be a few more, we are not yet in a position where we can say that democracy is taking roots in Africa. As I am writing this essay, Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast is gearing up for inauguration as president for the third time in the midst of foul cry by opposition parties regarding the election and Y. Museveni is in an election campaign that can extend his term to the sixth one. The question, therefore, is why has it taken so long

and we do not yet see light at the end of the tunnel regarding overcoming the hurdles to so-called democratization? There is no easy answer to this question. But I would like to say that explaining this should be the task of our political scientists, philosophers and generally our intellectuals. Just like Nzamujo approached the problem of production holistically deploying different forms of knowledge, why can't we approach the problem of governance, rights, justice, etc. in the same way drawing on indigenous wisdom, knowledge, practices and values and internationally available knowledge? The conviction that the values and systems of the West are panacea for our problems is no more tenable. Without ruling out what we can learn from outside and the treasure of knowledge that humankind has accumulated so far, we can also try to go back to the values, political philosophies and practices of African communities that helped those communities to survive and thrive.

Africa has lots of institutions, philosophies and mechanisms of guiding politics. Behind the civilizations in Egypt, West Africa like Timbuktu and Songhai, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, we find wisdom, philosophies and values that provided the most general guiding principles for life. The Gadaa system of the Oromo, for example, has elaborate mechanisms of how laws are made; power is peacefully transferred to the next ruling Gadaa group and all the paraphernalia of governance and political decision-making mechanisms that is centered on the interests of the people. Africa's indigenous philosophies, cultures and values have enabled African communities manage their various affairs. Abandoning the economy based on cooperation and solidarity, how and why have we shifted to the economy of greed and competition which made our economy extraverted and focused on satisfying the needs of capitalism, rather than that of the African peoples? These are just few examples. The idea of philosophy with meaning and significance requires re-examining the entire philosophical exercise, making distinction between the rhetoric about lofty ideals of Western philosophy and its support for slavery, racism and colonialism and reappropriating the indigenous philosophy for revival. Ideas of an African renaissance have been raised both by scholars and politicians. Such renaissance can be anchored around our indigenous philosophies and cultures in a way that we are ready to engage other philosophies dialogically and function in the spirit of interculturality. For this, the task of our intellectuals is of paramount importance.

It is known that Nietzsche (1995) underlined the importance of freedom for pursuing philosophy. The conditions of many countries do not allow studying political and social problems freely and express them. Africa has leaders who want to lecture to professors what they should do. Some leaders could go to the level of telling us that politics is no go area for us and that what we should do in class is teach what is in the curriculum. Academic freedom faces challenges from the powers that be. Hence, it is difficult to demand from intellectuals to challenge power based on truth and the ideas of freedom, justice, equality and the like. But, can we make progress without speaking the truth to power? It is possible to see the dilemma of intellectuals in Africa where there is an obligation to tell the truth and the cost could be very high. In places where there is freedom of expression this is possible, but in Africa it is still dangerous to speak the truth to power. In such dangerous situations where freedom is in short supply intellectuals should use different means and ways in their different discourses to tell the truth.

It is the task of philosophers to make philosophy relevant to real life. Is there freedom and an ideal condition for philosophers and intellectuals in general to do what I am pleading for? No, however, it is not also an issue that can be given up fearing the brutal consequences. Slowly but surely Africa has to open up to listen to dissenting voices. Other tactics through which power can be forced to listen to its people have to sought. What are the reasons behind assertions that certain issues are no go areas for philosophy? There are no convincing rational/philosophical reasons why philosophy should not deal with issues of justice, peace, hunger, environmental problems, global warming, and many more. This is an issue that is the concern of many African philosophers. Starting with the asymmetrical relations between the North and the South following Africa's encounter with Europe, and the extraverted relations (economic, cultural, educational, etc.) between the North and the South, African philosophy tries to critically and rationally understand it. Philosophical deliberations are not and should not be

limited to abstract metaphysical and ontological questions alone. In fact, the way metaphysical and ontological questions are treated has either a direct or an indirect bearing on the manner in which we understand and try to solve real questions of life, reason why we say it is possible to evolve a philosophy with meaning and significance for us.

Philosophy emerges in a socio-cultural context being rooted in that context but also as a self-consciousness of that context that could be helpful in understanding that situation and solve some of the problems that the socio-cultural context encounters. Such a philosophy has to work out its proper task. Is the task of such philosophy to regurgitate what others have said about philosophy or can it set its tasks as it directly relates to its own context? It is with this in mind, I believe, that Kiros (2001: 4) said:

Philosophy in the African cultural landscape is destined to be a practical moral task, a task imposed by the tragedies of history: the brutalities of slavery; the exacting torture of colonialism; the menacing despotisms of the early phases of industrialization; the excesses of capitalist indifference to the plight of the poor... the blindness of the African bourgeoisie to the condition of the poor in Africa. Intelligence, sympathetic imagination and philosophy as a practical moral activity can overcome all these man-made obstacles.

The methods and principles of philosophical inquiry are useful here. Philosophy's rational and critical inquiry and the hermeneutic method that it uses are helpful and indispensable where there is talk of philosophy. In fact, what its methods call for and what we have to take earnestly is the point that those methods are necessary in coming to grips with the kind of problems that Kiros (2001) outlined above. According to him, before venturing into abstract philosophical thought it is necessary to develop principles that could make humans real moral agents that are capable of leading a life deserved by humans. He outlines the principles as follows:

The first principle is the recognition of food, health, shelter and clothing as inalienable human rights. ...The second principle is a demand for the absolutely necessary duty humans may have in the recognition of the importance of freedom for those who think and feel that they are unfree. When the basic human material needs of the poor are met, only then may the Africans be able to think about non-material human needs... (ibid: 3).

Justice and above all social justice is an important concept in search of which lots of struggles have been carried out for centuries. The price people are paying for the attainment of social justice is staggering. In association with this, global justice is an important concept. In the relations between the North and the South global justice requires the attention of philosophers and philosophical discourse. The extraverted nature of our relations with the North makes a discourse on global justice an imperative. There has been a long-held debate on global justice among well-known Western philosophers like Pogge (2001), Attfield (1992) and many more.

In the first place, a debate and concern with global justice from which ever location, Europe or Asia, Latin America or Africa is necessary. The debates conducted by the likes of Pogge as mentioned above are important in bringing out the disparities and asymmetries pertaining to the North-South relationship. What could be regrettable though in this regard is the point that the debate goes on between Northern philosophers with the exclusion of the rest of us who are at the receiving end of the injustices. The fact that it goes on between philosophers in the North is based on the assumption that there is no knowledge of philosophy or otherwise that can contribute to the debate. This is not correct and acceptable as it can be seen from the writings of Oruka (1997), Graness (2011), Gutema (2013) and others. There is a lot that African Philosophy can contribute to this debate from the position of the victims of global injustice and based on the notion of justice inherent in African wisdom, both oral and written. Involving in such a debate is one way of doing philosophy with meaning and significance for us/Africa. It is also important from the point of a dialogue between philosophies embedded in different cultural contexts that could be useful for mutual enlightenment/enrichment.

3.2. In Lieu of Outcomes

Politics has been the major problem of African countries. African postcolonial politics has been politics without foundation and in my opinion, it is one of the major causes of Africa's predicament. Colonialism undermined Africa's indigenous knowledge and institutions with regards to virtually everything: culture, education, politics, economy and others. It came with all of its baggage to shape Africa in a way suitable for the purpose of colonialism. It is as a result that politics that does not have roots in African traditions and cultures emerged after African countries became independent. Such politics undermined the indigenous and long-established system of governance. Of course, it could not be expected that the colonial system would leave the indigenous system intact. One of the pretexts for colonization was the assumption that since the colonized countries did not have systems of economy, politics, education and the like, it was the colonialists' burden to bring this to the colonized countries, while the actual reason is exploitation and shaping these countries in a way suitable for the colonizers. As was usually said, it was a civilizing mission, but the civilizing mission was only a smoke screen in the guise of which the colonized countries were exploited and their populations enslaved and denigrated.

Without indulging into the complexities involved in this, I want to say that it was wrong on our part to assume that the system of the West/colonialists works for us. When the colonialists left, what happened in the formerly colonized countries was to try to own the ideas and institutions of the colonizers without making any significant changes to them. The two serious problems in this regard are that we were not able to see that ideas and institutions that were developed in Europe could not be suitable for us as they are and secondly, we were not ready to even use those ideas and institutions in the way they were planned to operate. Despite the conviction, real or imagined, that democracy would work for Africa we were not ready to fulfill the requirements that could make democracy work. African elections have very rarely been peaceful, free and fair and the institutions that are supposed to implement the elections have very rarely been neutral and ill equipped in many respects to lead the elections.

The important point should have been, instead of jumping on the machinery that was meant to oppress the African peoples, we should have thought about our institutions and a system that could not promote extraversion. In this regard, we could have plenty of choices depending on our situation. We could have followed Cabral (1973) and say "return to the source". Returning to the source is a rich concept that could involve tapping into the ideas that sustained African communities for generations. It could also mean looking for social forces and agencies that could be vital for instituting change.

Some of the leaders of African independence like K. Kaunda, L. S. Senghor, K. Nkrumah, and J. Nyerere were aware of the fact that leading newly independent African countries required new ideas/ideology. Interestingly enough, at least in rhetoric, they were not after copying the ideas of the West or the East or about producing new ideas from a scratch. This emanates from realizing the point that the colonial ideas and institutions will not be helpful in achieving genuine independence on the one hand and that there are also indigenous ideas that we can lean on, on the other.

Each one of them had their own version of how their respective countries could be led into independence. Accordingly, Senghor had his ideas of Negritude as black civilizational values based on an indigenous epistemology suitable for achieving genuine independence. Nkrumah's consciencism was about developing a new ideology based on the encounters between the indigenous Ghanaian system and elements of Western Christian thinking and Islamic thinking. Nyerere based his thinking on the ideas of Ujaama (African Socialism). He thought that neither Western ideas of Socialism nor those of the East are workable for Africa's revival and change. Rather Africa's independence and development should be based on the African ideas that have already been used by communities. These could have been the ideas that could have brought Africa forward leaving behind the problems caused by colonialism. Those people mentioned and their contemporaries in other parts of Africa could be considered as philosopher rulers who could have evolved appropriate ideas for

postcolonial Africa had such move not been thwarted by a whole range of internal and external factors.

It was observing these and the hurdles that postcolonial rule and democracy were facing in Africa that Wiredu (1997) called for a return to Africa's indigenous mechanism of political decision making. Referring to some of those philosopher rulers Wiredu claimed that in Africa, the indigenous system of political decision making was based on consensus not majoritarian democracy. It is this system that has been entrenched in the African cultures and whose advantages over democracy are observable that he pleaded for. Why majoritarian democracy could not take roots in Africa after decades of attempts to introduce democracy is that it could not have social roots in Africa; it has not been developed in the African context and is not appropriate to handle Africa's problems as they are; it may require some adaptation to the context. What could be more appropriate for Africa is the indigenous system that has a long-established tradition.

While this is a controversial issue among many scholars, it is an issue worth grappling with, particularly when we see the type of challenges democracy is facing in Africa. The important question that could be raised here is that: has Africa looked inward into what it has before it embraced others' ideas and institutions? Has Africa tried to give any role for the indigenous ideas apart from characterizing them as archaic siding with Eurocentric thinking? Has Africa also tried to go beyond those things and tried to produce new knowledge that suits Africa's postcolonial context and reality? This requires re-examining our conception of philosophy. Studying philosophy requires from us defining what it is and the kind of purposes for which we need it. Do we need to teach what so-called established philosophers said or are we using it as a form of knowledge that provides us with new avenues to understand our situation and try to produce knowledge suitable to that situation?

I have already indicated that philosophy or any knowledge for that matter is based on experience. The call for a philosophy with meaning and significance is based on this assumption that knowledge produced on others' experience hardly makes sense for people with other experiences. This does not of course rule out the possibility of learning from/appropriating others' philosophies for various reasons. While learning from others and appropriating methods and principles that may be dubbed universal, it is however, necessary that we have our own philosophy, because it is a philosophy based on our experiences and anchored in our cultural context that can be of significance for us. Actually, we have to question here the purpose of philosophy. The purpose of philosophical education should not be just to assimilate already available knowledge. It should rather focus on creating new knowledge that is anchored in the existing reality/situation and hence can be an impetus for solving the problems of that society.

Owing to the type of questions that it raises and the methods and tools used to answering the questions, philosophy can give us a synoptic view. It is a view that is able to arrive not only at a comprehensive understanding, but also which can look into the future. There are philosophies whose foci are survival and flourishing. This is seen in the way they understand the reality, craft their understanding of life and also answer the question of how to live. There is an understanding that the four major questions that philosophy wants to answer are questions of: what is real? What can be known? What is valuable and? How should we live? Answering these questions have been and still are the tasks of philosophy. Grappling with these questions with a synoptic view that philosophy provides should enable us looking into the future. Non-anthropocentric philosophies that call for harmony between humans and nature are important in this regard. Education in general and philosophical education in particular have to provide knowledge that, without tampering with nature in a way that puts survival at danger, guarantees survival and flourishing. Education should avoid serving humankind's insatiable desire to dominate nature. Philosophy should help in setting the goal of education properly. Education that pursues efficiency and profit at the expense of survival is dangerous. We have to have an education with proper priorities. If the goal of education is to put theories before values and ideologies before human beings, we cannot expect much from such education.

We have to be very clear about the necessity of philosophical education. It should avoid mere abstraction for its own sake and engage in answering questions in a way that we could solve society's problems. The conditions under which philosophical education should be pursued are hardly available. Nevertheless, it is possible to pursue philosophical education whose focus is the good of human beings. It may be very difficult to have the kind of conditions that Nietzsche (1997), for example, stipulated for pursuing philosophical inquiry. According to him (1995/1872-74: 182), the pursuit of "a philosophical genius includes free manliness of character, early knowledge of mankind, no scholarly education, no narrow patriotism, no necessity for bread winning, no ties with the state – in short, freedom and again freedom."

These points could be points of very tall order for us. But there is also no other way to achieving the kind of life that guarantees justice, peace and development. A crucial area where philosophy could make difference in Africa is where it raises questions of justice, freedom and the social and political practices that make life miserable for Africans. We can cite Nietzsche's (1997) points just mentioned above and lament that in the absence of freedom what can we do? Equally we should know that freedom is not given, it has to be attained through a protracted struggle including in the academia. How can we establish a political system that is citizen-centered whose main goal is not about ruling but about enabling citizens to solve their problems? This cannot be attained easily and readily. It can only be attained cumulatively when our efforts in teaching, research, public dialogues and engagements are geared towards making it possible for Africans to control their destiny and have a big say in who rules them how, as for example, our ancestors were able to do using the Gadaa system, which activities should get priority to change their lives, how they educate their young generation, etc.

These are ideal conditions that cannot be easily available. However, we have to know that we do not pursue a goal only under ideal conditions. We need to strive for the proper use of philosophy with the conviction that we are not in a situation free from philosophical ideas. The kind of ideas with which our ancestors maintained the environment and practiced a kind of life that guaranteed harmony and survival can be useful. In the words of Cabral, we have to return to our sources in order to properly reappropriate our indigenous wisdom. We have to also sift from the kind of knowledge of humanity that is available only those that are useful for us. Those that are not denigrating, that do not put profit and dominating nature over survival and harmony can be incorporated into our thinking and be taught to our young people. That can pave the way for new generations equipped with knowledge that will enable them to understand themselves. If they understand themselves it won't be difficult for them to shape their future.

4. Conclusions

What is a philosophy with meaning and significance for us? Like any other philosophy, it is a philosophy which deals with the four main questions that philosophy has dealt with since its very inception, namely: What is real? What can be known? What is valuable and? How should we live? We can answer these questions in both abstract and concrete ways. When we answer them in the abstract, we keep on discussing what philosophers in other cultures have said regarding these questions. In this way, we do justice neither to our communities nor to philosophy itself. But if we are able to learn from the principles germane to philosophy and then address questions of real life, then we can succeed in doing philosophy with meaning and significance.

The purpose of philosophy should not be to repeat what others have already said. The purpose of dealing with what others have said is to learn from them if there is something to be learned and also evaluate, criticize what is in there. Even when we find what others have said to be important and useful, we should not lose sight of the condition under which the philosophical ideas came into existence. As is usually said, the power of philosophy lies in words. The words will have power, an enlightening power when they are able to contribute to the solution of problems that our communities are facing. This power lies in how we are able to be creative vis-à-vis the problems we encounter. Hence, the question is, how can we use what philosophy can provide to enlighten our situation. Our

situation gives us not problems alone. It provides us also with solutions in the form of indigenous knowledge: philosophical, scientific, environmental, political and so on. The way in which we can practice philosophy with meaning and significance is when we are able to use what philosophy can give us to explain our situation.

Moreover, it is when we are able to see what we have in the form of philosophy or sources of philosophy or political decision-making process, or environmental ethics and others and try to reappropriate them or return to them that we start to produce philosophy with meaning and significance. Does our philosophy have meaning and significance for our students, communities, our country, our continent and relate to the various concerns of our community? That is the question. The answer can be yes, if we can bring abstract philosophical questions down to our concrete problems and if we are able to deploy the kind of philosophical knowledge available both local and otherwise to solve problems. In other words, we have to be able to understand philosophy in our own context. The question should be: does it help in enlightening us in tackling and addressing certain issues that are of concern to us? If it can help us give answers to our social, political, moral and similar questions, then that philosophy can be said to have meaning and significance for us.

5. References

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