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PHILOSOPHY, NATION BUILDING AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This essay understands youth development as a programme that entails the evolvement of enlightenment and empowerment programmes and projects for the emancipation of youths from poverty. Such emancipation programme is total in the sense that it entails equipping the youths with the necessary ingredients required for the reformation of society and the transformation of the environment. To accomplish this task the youths must be prepared to overcome poverty both mentally and physically. A sick mind can only produce a sick body and a sick environment. It will therefore, amount to a huge waste if the youths are endowed with material resource without a corresponding mental capability to manage such resource. Invariably, much of the physical poverty around us is a manifestation of the mental poverty within us. That is to say, the inability to utilize the ontological power dormant within us (i.e., our prowess of transcendence) has left youths of most nations of the world in disarray. Based on this, we make the point that a profound development programme for the youths must begin by addressing the issue of individual self-identity, which should translate to the development of the society as a whole.

The methodology employed in this essay is both deconstructive and interpretative, aimed at shedding more light and deeper insights on the issue at hand.

Key Words: Youth Development, Philosophy.

Introduction

Beginning with the ancients, the philosophic enterprise (in whatever guise it appears) has always demonstrated its prowess for world consolidation and world transformation. The organizational character of philosophy is captured in certain fundamental concepts such as *Logos*, *Nous* and *Tao* found in the ancient philosophies of Kemet, Greece and China. *Logos*, in Kemetite philosophy, is variously addressed as “thought, creative power, creative utterance, order, form, artificer and potter” (James, 19 59:140). *Logos* is also designated as the power for “conceptualization and utterance, planning and governance” (Onyewuenyi, 1994: 2004). In ancient Greek philosophy the concept of *Logos* is replicated in the philosophies of Heraclitus and the Stoics and is used to mean “the cosmic principle of intelligibility, the principle of thought and of consciousness in which is contained the forms of all things to come” (Omogbe, 1999: 11 & 72-73).

In a way, *Logos* depicts the power of *Nous* (Mind) to bring about order in the midst of chaos or to ameliorate anarchic situations. For there to be harmony or balance in the universe, *Mind* must learn how to keep eternal watch over human activities and this is represented in the Egyptian Mystery System by the naked eye of God Ausar (the Greek Osiris) signifying omniscience and omnipotence. Anaxagoras, of ancient Greece equates *Nous* with “mind, intelligence, consciousness, or spirit, it is an infinite, spiritual divine principle that directs and controls all things” (Omogbe, 21-22). The ability of mind to oversee human daily activities and

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organize human crass experience is captured by philosophers of the existential phenomenology in the doctrine of *self-reflexivity*. The doctrine of *self-reflexivity* describes basically how the human mind subjectively scrutinizes its activities with a view to attaining objectivity. But this subjective scrutinizing of the activities of the mind by the mind, can be extended to the objective supervision of human physical activities. Used in this sense, the doctrine of *self-reflexivity* would immediately call to mind Thomas Jefferson's theory of *eternal vigilance* which he (Jefferson) says is the price of democracy. It is along this line of thinking that Confucianism conceives of *Tao* as the "multiple principles, which govern each separate class of things in the universe" (Unah, 1996: 172). For instance, there is the *Tao* of hardness, which governs all hardness and is separate from the hardness of individual things. Invariably, the three concepts so far analyzed demonstrate that the goal of philosophy is to assist us in the planning of our universe. Little wonder Jose Ortega Y Gasset defines philosophy as "the plan of the universe" (1960: 60).

The word plan refers to some set targets or projects and the framework (including time scheme) for accomplishing such set targets. In essence, the act of planning in a way entails the act of building. Building as a term refers to the act of construction and construction is both the act and process of making or turning things from one state to another to give them finesse. Thus, the act of construction signifies the human power of transcendence for planning, construction, organization, transformation and development. By Human transcendence is meant the human power for illuminative visioning, it is our native ability to wonder about the things around us, and then project into the ideal state of the unknown, where upon our creative and inventive powers are aroused to discover loftier ways of ameliorating chaotic situations. Accordingly, we define nation building as the act of human ingenuity to input order into the chaos in the society made possible by the mental capacity to conceive about an ideal state and to move human existence to this newly conceived ideal state, thereby elevating the totality of our existence from a lower to a higher level. In actual fact, nation building is a herculean task that requires profundity and the display of certain sterling qualities such as fortitude, forethought, prudence, discipline, expertise, commitment, wisdom and patriotism. If the builders of a nation lack these salient transcendent qualities, they build in vain. For where there are men of transcendence, the courage and the ingenuity to surmount obstacles and to turn adversities into advantages there lay the hope for the future. This is the key to development.

The point is sufficiently made that the task of building a nation would remain impossible without the human power of transcendence, which we conjecture is most abundantly distributed among the youths. Youths represent the young at heart, that restless and resonant group noted for such qualities as resilience, perseverance, endurance and diligence. Youths signify the stage of transition and transformation towards self-emancipation, self-regeneration, self-realization and self-actualization. Youths depict that tenacious and boisterous bunch noted for the zeal for adventure. As the torchbearers in whom lies the future of the nation, it behooves one to state categorically that: "the moulding of the youths amounts to the building of the nation".

Philosophy and the Task of Youth Development

If we consider the fact that philosophy is commonly associated with wisdom, if we also grant that every other academic discipline is in a way a specialized kind of philosophy dealing with the dissemination of wisdom, and that wisdom is one of the cardinal corpuses required for the effective organization of society, we would most likely reach the agreement that the task of youth development rests on philosophy. To speak in a philosophical parlance, the term development refers to the sum total (i.e. qualitatively and quantitatively) improvement and cultivation of the talents inherent in the youths to the attainment of self-awareness, self-mastery and self-reliance. The word "self" as used in this context refers to the "transcendent powers" latent in every individual. Therefore, our operational definition of development is purely transcendental or ontological.

To be precise, development is the human transcendent ability for planning and the iron determination to persevere towards the implementation of the policies and programmes so legislated by us within a time frame. In metaphysics for instance, distinction is made between anthropological metaphysics, which deals with the analysis of the anthropological attributes of man, and ontology, which deals with the delineation of man as a being with transcendent abilities. These two ways of demarcating metaphysics, as a matter of fact, provide impetus into two ways of delineating the issue of development and these include the anthropological

and ontological dimensions to development. The business of metaphysical anthropology is to explain the process by which development comes about and the roots which sustain this very process of development. Whereas the issue of process refers to the theory of change, the question of root is meant to establish which theory of consciousness underlies the dynamics of change. Thus, as it pertains to the question of the process of development, metaphysical anthropology wants to establish whether development follows a determined course, that is to say, whether development has a *telos* and a *ratio* and whether these *telos* or *ratio* is dialectical, linear, cyclical, centripetal and centrifugal and so on. The aim here is to substantiate the claim that “change” is the very factor responsible for the social, historical, economic and cultural dimensions to development. The theory of change as the factor responsible for development is further rooted in theories of consciousness. The aim at this level is to explain which ideological orientation underlies the process of development or the dynamics of change in the socio-historical cum politico-economic pattern of a nation. Attempts are made to explain whether development proceeds in the fashion of idealism, materialism, realism, or spiritualism. The watchword here is to construct abstract ideological orientations for development. Thus, anthropologically speaking, a complete theory of development is one that explains how change and the ideas responsible for change are connected in human experience.

At the level of ontology, development is regarded as a transcendental function of the human mind. The interest here is to elucidate what is meant by the *fundament* (drawn from my Doctoral thesis, 2001: 49-52; see also Unah, 1997, 18-20 for the “*fundament of ontology*”) of development. By the term *fundament*, we imply not the essentials, fundamentals or rudiments of development, but the ontological ground or soil from which the prowess of development takes root, which has been identified as human transcendence. As earlier indicated, human transcendence refers to the rational and imaginative powers of human beings to transcend physical experience into the superevoid, to elevate from the world of actualities into the world of possibilities, from the realm of what is in experience to the realm of that which is not in experience, from the level of the known to the level of the unknown. It is at this transcendental world of absolute tranquility and equanimity of mind that we gather the rational and imaginative stamina for construction and transformation. Needless to say, this act of human transcendence aptly captures the definition of metaphysics as the science of beyondness. In essence, ontological delineation of the theory of development is preoccupied not with the explanation of abstract ideological orientations that act as the roots of the process of development, but with the elucidation of the transcendent ground that makes human anthropological activities possible, thereby amplifying the point that this transcendent ground is the fundament of development.

To illustrate, we liken development to a tree, in which ideologies are regarded as the roots, cultures as the trunk and all academic disciplines as the branches. It is expedient to question about the ground or soil in which this tree is rooted, and about the texture and nourishment of this ground. The ground or soil from which the tree of development takes root and derives nourishment is no other than human transcendence. By its texture, this ontological ground is very rich and its nourishing capacity is inexhaustible. Whenever we go transcendental, whenever we call upon our power of transcendence, we come out with innumerable ways of surmounting the vicissitudes. Needless to say, there is no obstacle so difficult that cannot be surpassed by man. Therefore, to make consultations of our power of transcendence is to journey into the unknown, to voyage into human nothingness, which is that boundless expanse and limitless potentialities latent inside of us. At anytime human existence gets to that nihilistic point of imminent danger, the more our power of transcendence is aroused such that we become exceedingly resilient and ingenious. Thus, piety is an essential quality of human thought, which is demonstrated by the graceful resolution of every difficult situation.

Granted that our operational definition of development is ontological, granted also that we have defined youth as those young groups in whom the transcendent ability for transformation is most abundant, we now proceed to state in what context the expression “Youth Development” is used in this essay. By “Youth Development”, we mean a *Youth Training Programme* (YTP) targeted at the qualitative and quantitative improvement of youths. It is a manpower development programme aimed at enlightening and empowering youths, to equip them with the skill and rudiments for self-reliance. Thus, whereas the qualitative improvement of youths aims at the discovery and exploration of individual youth talents and the acquisition of greater skills, the quantitative aspect of the programme has the task of mobilizing youths to use their talents and skills to advantage by improving their living conditions. We however, warn that such a scheme would meet with total failure if government does not adequately fund it. Besides, government should also ensure that

such *Youth Training Programme* (YTP) is supervised by disciplined administrators who have interest of the youths and the nation at heart.

Furthermore, since we assume that the programme we advocate is meant to radically address the swelling number of unemployed youths in our society, it is only proper that the *Youth Training Programme* (YTP) talked about, should be the immediate concern of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). It is the duty of such a Directorate of Employment to know how many youths are unemployed, their areas of competence or specialization and to also establish training schemes for those youths without areas of competence. To make this task of youth development much effective and convenient, the National Directorate of Employment should constantly liaise with the captains of industries and commerce. Having established this and depending on their areas of interest, youths should be sent to the various industries and commercial centers in the land for training. The duration of such a training scheme is expected to last between two to three years and should be adequately funded by the government. It is also expected that the trainees should be paid some weekly stipend. The idea is that during the course of the training, youths who prove themselves worthy should be given employment in the industry or commercial outfit where they trained. Those who express the willingness to be self-employed should be provided with soft loans for the establishment of small-scale industries. The maintenance and sustenance of such small-scale industries should not constitute a problem since the youths in question would have acquired managerial skills during the course of training. This apart, it is also the responsibility of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) to closely monitor the performance of such small-scale industries.

The truth is that a youth training and development programme is a must for any nation that wishes to make the dream of sustainable development real. “The British for example, have the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) established by the government under the Employment and Training Act of 1973 to run employment and training services to ease the growing burden of the nation’s long-term unemployed. It works closely with other agencies, including the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry through the *Youth Training Scheme* (YTS)” (Bullock *et al.* 1988: 498 - 499). The scheme enables young school leavers from age 16 – plus to be taken on by employers and trained in a given field. The government pays the employer for each trainee over a period of up to two years and the young person receives a small weekly wage also met by the government (P. 499). Of course youngsters who proved their mettle are absorbed in and put on payroll after the training is over. We would like to mention at this juncture that the purpose of a *Youth Training Programme* (YTP) is to raise a virile group of youths with great managerial abilities. A youth training and development scheme is not just intended to provide youths with employment, but to get the youths to cultivate the etiquette of self-esteem, self-confidence and iron discipline required for sustainable development. This is the essential reason why such a training programme should last up to two to three years, thereby fulfilling the dream of preparing the youths for the task of emancipation. Besides, we also acknowledge the fact that such a programme should take into cognizance the historical, social, political and cultural peculiarities of the nation in question.

Youths and the Task of Nation Building

The picture of the nation we have in mind is that of a plural society in which religion and culture is multi-dimensional. Invariably, the youths that live in a plural society is from different religious persuasions and cultural backgrounds. Problem then ensues as to how youths from diverse cultural backgrounds and religious persuasions could be tacitly coordinated for the task of nation building. Here in lies the essential task of philosophy as an ontological orientation, which has the task of instituting unity in the midst of diversity, harmony in the midst of multiplicity and balance in the precarious interplay of human experience captured in the life-world. Such a daunting project could be made much easy if an outline of applied ontology is done. This means that philosophy becomes an action oriented theory for training and mobilizing the youths for the challenge of leadership through a comprehensive education scheme.

The comprehensive education scheme we have in mind is one that should be anchored on the principle of secularism. Secularism is the magic for bridging the gap created by religion and ethnicity in a plural society, for harnessing the talents of the individual youths and for imparting new skills into the youths.

In the first place, skill acquisition and the development of talent have nothing to do with religious affiliation or ethnic background. The insistence on administering the affairs of a plural society on religion and culture will only generate greater violence. No matter how we go about it, the question would always arise as to which of the religions or cultures should play the dominant role. If such a situation were allowed, would members of other religions and cultures not agitate against what they perceive to be gross injustice? The matter is made worse when the education system of a plural society is anchored on the tenets and norms of a certain religion or culture. To do so would amount to the training of stereotypes for leadership. Developed nations of the world de-emphasize religion and culture in their education systems for the obvious reason that religion and culture have a way of promoting dogmatism, ignorance, poverty and fear in the minds of the people. This might explain the reason why religious and ethnic crises are hardly experienced in such developed nations. The same cannot be said of the developing nations of the world, especially, those developing nations that are plural in nature and had to free themselves from colonial tutelage.

The tendency in most developing nations of plural nature is to make religion or culture the corner stone of education. This has a way of corrupting and sectionalizing the psyche of the youths such that over time they begin to impose the tenets and norms of their favourite religion or culture on the rest of the nation. What more do we expect of psyches that have been religiously dissociated and thoroughly ethnicized. This explains why everywhere we turn we are confronted with problems of religious and tribal conflicts. Besides, religious bigotry and ethnicism have aggravated the problems of nepotism, mediocrity, poverty, ignorance, naked fear, fanaticism, intolerance and violence in most developing nations. In fact, if for any thing, religion and culture aggravate, rather than ameliorate class-consciousness and discrimination in the society. Joseph Fishman aptly makes this point when he defines ethnicism as *Ethnicclasscity* (1989, 7). He goes ahead to state that ethnicism depicts an antagonistic and discriminatory behavioural pattern in a plural society. What Fishman failed to mention is that this antagonistic behaviourism is worsened by religion. True, religion preaches universal brotherhood, but such a beautiful tenet is unwittingly anchored on the fanatical and absolutist behaviour of holier and superior than thou attitude. So that rather than help in ameliorating the problem of sectionalism, religion actually aggravates and entrenches it. This is the reason why we make a serious case for the total departure from colonial missionary type of education. This incidentally shall form the focus of a future paper to be entitled “Colonial Missionary Education and the Leadership Crisis in Africa”.

We can now understand why we advocate that the paradigm for our new system of education for self-emancipation should be totally based on the principle of secularism. This, however, does not imply that we should totally abolish religion or do away with culture. It simply means that we use the principle of secularism to harness the universal tenets of both culture and religion, which the custodians and adherents of these noble human orientations have unwittingly masturbated out of context. Beyond the craze for a heavenly bliss in the hereafter by religion and the quest for identity by culture, religion and culture have certain cardinal messages to bequeath to mankind, which include the principles of love, care, sense of duty, obedience, loyalty, discipline of the soul, patriotism, empathic feeling for others, commitment to self and others, prudence, wisdom and so on. These principles are adequately captured in the doctrine of the “Golden Mean,” which admonishes us to always act sensibly and selflessly by “doing unto others as we wish them do unto us”.

The pitiable thing however, is that every religion, like culture plays hypocrisy by pretending to be the only chosen way to the attainment of human earthly bliss. Every religion pretends to be the God chosen way and emphatically states that without the fear of God, man can hardly manage his societal affairs. The interesting phrase here is “fear of God”. Religiously speaking, one should think that “fear of God” would mean holding God in awe and worshipping him in fear and tremble, believing that such gullible state of affair should direct the believer to the right way of doing things. Upon investigation, one discovers that the phrase “fear of God” merely captures those transcendent and virtuous human attributes, which have been outlined above. The truth is that virtue is entirely a human property and a secular affair. Invariably, all the human secular virtues outlined above constitute the basis of what is commonly referred to as “societal values” which invariably form the basis for training up civilized members of the society. Consequently, the whole gamut of the project of society is aimed at the taming of human vice, for the actualization of human virtue, for the reformation of society, and the transformation of environment. It thus becomes the case that the attainment of self-fulfillment (i.e. having a sense of belongingness) in the society amounts to the attainment of secular salvation here on earth.

Elsewhere, in the papers entitled “Sharia in a Secularist State: A Jurisprudentialist Analysis” and “Ontological Clarification of Accountable Leadership”, the point has been sufficiently made that religion should be completely de-emphasized from governmental and educational matters. The point was also made that the businesses of sermonizing and proslytization should be left entirely in the hands of the adherents of religion. Rather, the government should concern itself with the actualization of the earthly or secular purpose of religion and that this should be done in such a way that the secular purpose of religion is harmonized with the universal tenets of culture. This way, much of the religious and cultural fanaticism, discrimination and violence that bestride our society will dissipate. In the said essays, we also drew up a comprehensive education system based on the principle of secularism for the training of future leaders who are depersonalized, detribalized, de-sectionalized, and who are also versatile and cerebral. What remains for us is to state that efforts should be garnered towards the inculcation of communalistic values into the youths. These include virtues such as kindheartedness or human heartedness, conscientiousness, commitment and devotion to duty, putting the interest of the society first before ones personal gain, and learning the need to protect and promote societal heritage. All this will go a long way to mould a group of virile and patriotic youths who will in turn build a very strong nation.

Concluding Remarks

The process of construction entails the concept of time. In the same vein, the concept of time is linked to the principles of inference, causality and teleology. Inference is the projection of thought in sequence or the serialization of things into pattern. The act of serialization in itself calls to mind the question of causality by which we classify events into antecedents (causes) and consequents (effects). By implication, inference and causality are further tied to the question of teleology. Teleology is the projection of thought into the supervoid for the purpose of design and organization. Design and organization both as acts and as processes boil down to the question of plan, which is purely futuristic. The simple way by which the concept of time is captured in human experience is to serialize human activities into past, present and future. In the real sense of things, the time issue is not just a concept in the mind but the actual structuring of activities into pattern. This is exactly what the acts of planning and construction entail. But the whole act and process of planning and construction are done in the present, because, as the link between the past and the future, it is in the present that the past is remolded into the future (i.e. the mistakes of the past are corrected in the future). It is in this sense that we speak of the arrival of a new dawn. As it pertains to the society, the youths can be regarded as the umbilical cord that link up a nations past to its future. This means that it is in the youths that a nation’s past is reshaped into the future. It is in the youths that we await the arrival of a new dawn, because, it is in the youths that a nation’s past mistakes are corrected. It then becomes clear to us that the task of youth development is an entirely futuristic programme. Therefore, to ignore the youths is to sever the umbilical cord that holds the nation together. Since it is in the youths that the future of the nation is shaped, the onus falls on the progressive members of the society and the government to ensure the sustenance of the society by mounting comprehensive and profound youth training schemes. This exactly is the high point of this essay, which is to the effect that any nation that wishes to overcome the mistakes of the past has no choice but to initiate programmes that would elevate the psyches of the youths beyond the idiosyncrasies of the past. Only when such has been accomplished can the youths be prepared to proceed about the tasks of societal and environmental transformation.

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