# PHILOSOPHY AS A MEANS FOR THE HUMAN PERSON TO ACHIEVE A BALANCE IN HUMAN EXISTENCE

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## Abstract

*This discourse discusses Philosophy from the point of view of its nature and branches, emphasizing their aims. The discourse finds that in the goal of philosophy through the aims of its branches, the human person is saved from all that deceives and placed in the direction of objectivity with regards to perception of his/her existence. On the strength of this liberation that Philosophy offers the human person, this write-up argues that the essence that philosophy offers to save the human person from falsehood also ensures the human person gaining a balanced view of life, a situation that saves one from living the life of an "other" to living one`s real life.*
**Key words:** Balance view, Existence, Falsehood, Human Person and Philosophy

## Introduction

In the past, the conception that philosophy cannot bake bread was very strong. Today, while it is true that the mentality with regards to the practical value of philosophy has certainly change, it is correct to say that a good number of people still believe that philosophy is a discipline of the abstract with value far removed from day to day existence of the human person. This discourse is precisely the direct opposite of the thinking that philosophy has no practical value. This work holds that philosophy not only has practical value but indeed gives the human person a balanced consciousness by aiding to ensure that the beliefs especially the fundamental belief giving rise to all other beliefs in the life of the human person are not just objects of inheritance for the human person but are beliefs the inner most being of the human person can come to terms with by having justifications for his/her beliefs and way of life.

## What Philosophy is? [1]

Philosophy is that field of studies that seek to understand the totality of everything that is in existence. The word Philosophy is from two Greek word, Philo meaning "Love" and Sophia meaning "wisdom." Literally if you put the two words together, it will be *Philosophia* which means "Love of wisdom."  The

love of wisdom that the etymological meaning of the word Philosophy stands for indicates the interest of philosophy to understand everything there is, including itself.

Traditionally, there are four branches of Philosophy. They are Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and Logic.

## Metaphysics[2]

The word metaphysics is derived from two Greek words, *Meta-* meaning "beyond" and *Physika* meaning "the physical, the universe." Putting the two words together, it will be *Metaphysika* meaning "beyond the physical or beyond the Universe." This etymological meaning therefore point to the attitude of philosophy of going beyond the Physical Universe in order to get a good gaze of everything in it and thereby gain a good understanding of reality, that is, everything that exists.

Metaphysics is regarded as the fulcrum of philosophy. As the fulcrum of Philosophy, it focuses on reality which is everything that exists. This is why it is expressed that from earliest times, metaphysicians have been trying to give a comprehensive account of the whole of reality, its nature, its structure and the place of man in the universe. It is within this context that Joseph Omoregbe holds that Metaphysics which has its point of departure in the physical world searches for the ultimate causes of things in order to understand and explain them.[3]

Metaphysics as the heart of Philosophy has issues that it particularly focuses on. They are called perennial issues because people of different generations will continue to ruminate about them as final explanations have not been given to them.

The perennial metaphysical issues are as follows:

1. The problem of Being 2. The problem of substance 3. The problem of essence and existence 4.The problem of Universals 5. The problem of appearance and reality 6.The problem of Unity and Diversity 7. The problem of change and permanence 8. The problem of causality 9. The problem of Mind and body 10. The problem of Freedom and determinism.

    These above are the typical perennial metaphysical issues that are also called problems.

**The Problem of Being** deals with the issue of what is *being*? One will realize that when the answer is supplied that being is the totality of everything as a whole and not in fragments, in existence, another question quickly follows: how is the totality of everything in existence as a whole to be defined? In addition, it is asked, is the experience of difficulty to define being to be termed *a problem*, because we can efficiently define what it is? Or we are to call it *a mystery* because the human person needs a supernatural being to assist in defining being in a way that makes sense? These questions are especially important because, let us observe that the human person is part of this entity called `everything in existence' to be defined!

**The problem of substance** bothers on the inner nature of things! For instance what makes us to recognize a man, a woman as a human being despite not having hands and legs? The power of abstraction by the human person is certainly at work, being able to abstract humanness without the accidents that accompany it, like hands and legs!

**The problem of Essence and Existence** basically assesses what constitutes the human person by asking in considering the existence of the human person: which comes first, essence or existence? Is what makes human fully in the human person before his/her coming into the world? Or he /she begin to acquire this only when he/she is in existence in the world?

**The Problem of the Universals:** here it is asked, are the universals real? Do they exist? For instance we talk about a white phone! Where is whiteness that the phone participates in in order to be white? Where does this whiteness live in? Can we show where whiteness is? Or the human person does not have to bother about this?

**The Problem of appearance and reality:** under here it is asked: is everything we see around us real and to be taken seriously? What about the fact of mirage on a tarred road seen a far on a sunny day as a pool of water? Is the water real? What lesson is to be taken here?

**The problem of Unity and Diversity:** Looking at our physical world, what is the dominate feature that one can see regarding the nature of our world? Does one see unity/ system in the things of the Universe or it is diversity,

which is disunity that is seen? What is most obvious in the universe, unity or diversity? Are things working together or working in disarray?

**The problem of change and Permanence:** here it is asked, what is the prominent feature of the world, is everything ever the same, without change, that is permanence? Or when one looks at the things of the universe, what one sees is evidence of everything constantly undergoing change?

**Problem of causality:** This considers the phenomenon cause and effect. In cause and effect, do you always have cause comes first before effect? When you have the cause, does it follow that the effect will always result? Has it not happened that the cause happened and the effect did not result?

**The Problem of Mind and Body:** Is there any relationship between these two entities of different make up, that is, extensionality and non-extensionality? At least we find out when somebody is angry, annoyed and not happy, sometimes we tell from the look on the face! Does this not indicate relationship between the body and mind despite their differences?

**The problem of Freedom and determinism:** this assesses whether humans are free? Are we free? Did we not inherit ideas from the society? Are these ideas not influencing how we see the world and how we behave? Are we really free from ideas that we inherited as human beings from our society? How free is the human person from ideas he met in his society? Any repercussion for our actions?

## Epistemology[4]

Epistemology is taken from two Greek words, "Episteme" meaning Knowledge and "Logos" meaning Theory. So if you put the two together, you have "Epistemelogos" literally meaning theory of knowledge.

As a theory of knowledge, epistemology started from the response of Philosophy to the ancient philosophers called the *Sophists who hold that nothing exists; that if any exists it cannot be known and if it can be known, it cannot be communicated.*

Philosophers respond to the Sophists with the enterprise of Epistemology. Epistemology in critically looking at the position of the Sophists hold that knowledge can be defined *as a justified true belief.* In essence three elements make up knowledge: 1. Belief 2. Truth and 3. Justification.

An example will suffice here! Take for instance, Makay, a man makes the statement: "Christy lives in Nigeria." In fulfillment of the criteria for knowledge by the enterprise of epistemology, it is asked, is there a belief? It could be answered yes there is, it is "Christy lives in Nigeria" by Makay. Is this statement true? Because Christy lives in Effurun, a city in Nigeria, makes the belief of makay true. Is there justification for this belief? Yes there is justification because Christy`s husband has a house in Effurun and Makay sees Christy, her children and husband living in that house. On the strength of this observation, Makay makes the statement that Christy lives in Nigeria as she lives in Effurun, a city in Nigeria.

The enterprise of Epistemology holds that as the belief of Makay that "Christy lives in Nigeria" has in addition the elements of **truth** and **justification,** it is right to say that Makay knows that Christy lives in Nigeria. In this way thus, it can be held that knowledge is possible.

### Ethics/ Moral Philosophy[5]
Ethics also known as moral Philosophy is the branch of Philosophy which concerns itself with morality of our actions. It therefore focuses on principles relevant for the determination of a good action as different from a bad action that must be avoided.

For instance we have utilitarianism which holds that the right action that advisable to be taken in the event of having to decide is that that brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. In this principle, apart from it being evident of the saying that two good heads are better than one, it endorses democracy as a possible system for running the human society in order to ensure satisfaction and comfort for the human person, as it emphasizes majority which can be likened to the greatest number that utilitarianism advocates.

In a critical sense then, the ethical theory of Utilitarianism asks that humans in their actions be mindful of the largest number in policies and direction of society. It is arguable that what is objectively likely to bring the greatest happiness to the

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greatest number of persons in the society is also likely to bring security to all or at least it makes it difficult for all to be taken for granted, everything being equal.

Also under ethics, we have Emmanuel Kant`s categorical imperative! Kant`s imperative proposes that humans should only go for that action which they will wish universalized as the permitted action. This for instance means that if you have to kill and call that action right, Kant`s categorical imperative holds that you must wish killing to be universally permissible and to be practiced by everyone!

It is obvious that if one would wish killing to be universally permissible, it would follow he/she is permitting just anyone to kill him/her without any repercussion! This in itself has enough moral lessons!

### Logic[6]
This is the branch of philosophy that concerns itself with rules of right thinking in order that the human mind might be saved from wrong thinking. It is within this context that I sometimes personally define logic as: "**Thinking, thinking thinking whether thinking is right.**" This brings to our minds that not anything goes in thinking. There are rules guiding thinking.
For instance we have deductive and inductive thinking/reasoning.

### Deductive Thinking
Deductive is that thinking in which the conclusion that is inferred follows from the premises of the entire thinking. An example of deductive argument:

> All human beings are mortal
> Joachim is a human being
>  Therefore, Joachim is mortal

The above is a deductive argument. The premises are:
1. All human beings are mortal
2. Joachim is a human being

The conclusion is: **Joachim is mortal**. This conclusion is a conclusion that can be conveniently inferred from Premises 1 and 2. This kind of thinking is known **as a valid thinking** because it follows from the two premises.

**Inductive Thinking**

Inductive thinking is a situation where the premises provide ground for the conclusion that is drawn. The conclusion does not follow from the premises. The premises however provide justification for the conclusion. Such thinking is only regarded as being sound and not valid. An example:

All   Americans I saw in Lagos in August 2016 were whites

All Americans that came to Warri for oil inspection in 2019 were Whites

Therefore All Americans are whites

In the above thinking, the premises provided ground for the conclusion that was drawn. The conclusion does not however follow from the premises because there was never any assertion in the premises that says all Americans are whites. The entire thinking above is merely a thinking that moved from particular cases of Americans to all of Americans, which is a generalization.  For we know there are Blacks who are Americans too.

The above is a little aspect of logic. As a little aspect of logic, we are able to pick the ideas of validity and soundness in thinking. Validity thus refers to the thinking that follows from the premises. Soundness on the other hand, refers to the thinking in which the premises provide ground for the conclusion drawn. The ideas of validity, soundness, fallacies and many others that cannot be mentioned in this discourse because of the limitation of it, aid in logic disciplining the human mind on the principles of right thinking in order that thinking may be free from all that deceives and wrong conclusions that follow.

**Insights from Philosophy and its branches for the Balance of the Human Person**

In the foregoing we have seen Philosophy and its different branches. In the nature of Philosophy, we essentially saw Philosophy as a discipline that is interested in understanding its environment not just in a descriptive way but in critically interrogating everything there is. In this pattern, Philosophy awakens the human person into the consciousness of his /her existence. One cannot be involved in Philosophy without the challenge to abandon passivity in life. Therefore, the discipline of Philosophy, by its nature generally, awakens and shakes passivity from the human mind, engaging it with human existence.

In the branches of Philosophy, beginning with Metaphysics, the human mind having been woken to consciousness in general explanation of Philosophy, in Metaphysics, it concretely begins to ask profound questions about his/her existence. For instance under problem of being which is an all- embracing term for all of reality, indeed the totality of all there is, one is able to ask about the definition of all that surrounds one. In asking for about this, the mind is provided an opportunity to be able to contemplate the meaning of the existence of the human Person, and by this the human life. The other perennial metaphysical concepts that he or she would have been introduced to, concepts like substance, essence and existence, universals, Unity and diversity, change and permanence, causality, mind and body and freedom and determinism will then become concepts to help the human person to articulate in a useful way to himself or herself the meaning of existence.

With the maturity of mind already acquired, thirsty to understand human existence, in epistemology, with curiosity of mind the human person understands that things cannot just be taken for granted. He/she welcomes the mission of Epistemology to find a concrete ground for all that we claim to know. The human person under epistemic influence reminds himself/herself of the three requirements for a meaningful claim to knowledge: the qualities of belief, truth and justification.

The three qualities of knowledge are understood and practiced not merely in the abstract and intellectual fashion; they are understood as the way to be taken to reduce knowledge to the true, essential and practical knowledge as opposed to the false, irrelevant and abstract knowledge claim that adds to the burden of human existence.

In ethics or moral philosophy, the quest of the human person for the best of life premised on meaning and truth of knowledge, is reinforcement. This reinforcement comes in by the penetrating questions of ethics where we ask about the justification for the actions we have chosen. Not losing focus that life and more life for the  human person is what is sought in ethics in the principle for instance of Utilitarianism – the greatest happiness for the greatest number and Kant`s categorical imperative that inhibits the human person from engagement in evil, the mind of the human person is further strengthened on balanced view of life.

Logic as the branch of philosophy that concerns itself with thinking /reasoning and asking for the reasons for the conclusions that we infer, strengthens even our

reasoning that frames our entire philosophy which is no longer merely philosophy but our view of life which enters into us, remains in us, saves us from living the life of an "other" and ensures the life of our own, the life we have justification and evidence for.  Surely, this kind of life balances the human person.

**Conclusion**

Philosophy is an academic discipline! There is no denying it. People obtain degrees in it from first degree to doctorate.  However, it should be appreciated by the presentation in this discourse, that beyond the degrees that are obtained in Philosophy as a course, Philosophy is capable of disciplining and training the human person to achieve balance in his or her life, restoring calm and ensuring the good life.

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