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PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL STUDIES

ATLANTIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Along with Sociology, Psychology and History, Philosophy is one of the seminar disciplines, which constitute the study of Education and make up the domain of theory which inform practice. In recent years, Philosophy of Education has been confirmed and established as a distinct branch of mainstream philosophy and the development of the discipline has greatly enhanced the academic status of educational studies in general.

The contemporary role of education is far-reaching and comprehensive. It consists, not only of the application of philosophical ideas, knowledge and expertise to the study of educational issues, but also the analysis of claims and arguments put forward in the other disciplines of education. Thus, the global and synoptic perspective of philosophy entails points of contact with every facet of the educational enterprise.

The overriding aim of this book is to present a clear, direct and straightforward account of the nature and scope of philosophy of education, with special reference to the Nigerian educational scene. Philosophizing about education. Is described as an activity which has a demonstrably practical component of all argument and discourse about educational matters.

The first two units deal with the nature and purpose of philosophy and philosophy of education, and this is followed by units on application of the branches or elements of philosophy and of philosophical analysis to educational concerns.

The final units examine the leading philosophical schools of thought and trace their connections with and implication for educational theory and practice. At each stage, examples and illustrations have been selected and drawn from writing on the Nigerian educational system.

This treatment of philosophy of education is presented in such a way as be especially relevant and understandable to student-teachers in colleges of Education, university undergraduates reading education, teachers, administrators and professional educators. Although it is directed specifically towards education in Nigeria, many of the ideas, arguments and issues outlined can be applied to west African education in general. Indeed, most of the applications of philosophy of education have a universal validity and are relevant in any country in the world where people are seriously engaged in the educational endeavor

Chapter 2

Philosophy as an Activity

Kant, I. (1966) mentioned “you will not learn from me philosophy, but how to philosophy; not thoughts to repeat, but how to think”

Philosophy is a process of asking question about the world, about man’s place in the world and about all aspects of human activity and experience. Philosophers, from ancient time to the present day have been concerned to critically examine the phenomenon of human existence, to evaluate the information and human affairs in their attempts to construct some systematic, coherent and consistent picture of all that we know and think. But this is a rather generalized and formalized conception of the enterprise, which calls for considerable refinement and specification if we are to do justice to the uniqueness and distinctness of the philosophical undertaking.

We can begin the process of refinement by considering Kant’s quotation which introduced this unit. This forcefully directs attention to the first characteristic of philosophical work, which needs to be emphasized, and this it is an active and dynamic enterprise, rather than a passive and static one. Philosophy is something, which is done, and, to large extent, one learns what philosophy is by doing philosophy

This may appear to be a strong assertion, but an analogy will help to explain the point more clearly. Consider the process of learning to read: someone learning to read is not normally, to understand and define what reading is . a person learns to read by engaging in the activity of reading: it could be said learning to read just is reading.

Similarly with doing philosophy. The aim of this book is to get student on the inside of the discipline, first, by acquainting them with what other philosophers have thought and said about the central problems of their field of inquiry, and secondly, this applies particularly to philosophy of education, by indicating the sort of techniques, data and forms of reasoning that are relevant to the handling of philosophical problems. In the final analysis, the intention is to present to students an inert corpus of ideas and knowledge, but rather to draw attention to a particular methodology, a way of looking at problems so that students may engage in the activity of philosophizing about education for themselves. On this account, learning what philosophy of education is, consists largely in doing philosophy of education.

Chapter 3

The Domain of Philosophy

In addition to being an activity, philosophy can be further characterized by distinguishing its concerns and interests from those of other disciplines. In philosophy, questions are asked but these questions are of certain kind and not just any question can count as a philosophical question. Thus after offering a rather general definition of philosophy as an activity, it is now time to map out the area within which that activity will take place.

The word philosophy comes from the ancient Greek noun philosophical which literally means love of wisdom, but this etymological fact does not convey much in itself. Apart from having distinctly old-fashioned, not to say grandiloquent, connotations, the notion of wisdom suggests, not a particular kind of intellectual activity, but the end product of such activity; what a few exceptional human may hope to achieve through the pursuit of knowledge in all its forms. We are still left with the task of delineating the particular domain of inquiry which is distinctive of philosophical activity.

Contemporary philosophers tend an exceptional interest in the limitations of their task, and are especially keen to state exactly what it is that they are and are not trying to achieve. Indeed, one the main features of the so-called "revolution in philosophy which was brought about earlier in the century by the

introduction of linguistic analysis into philosophical discourse was an increased awareness on the part of philosophers of the need to define the nature and scope of their undertaking.

But for the first philosophers, the definition of philosophy was not a problem. The Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, did not trouble themselves too much with describing what it was they were trying to do. As far as they were concerned, a philosopher was someone who was interested in the pursuit of knowledge and truth in all spheres of human experiences. They were concerned with the *weltanschauungs* (survey of the world as a whole, roughly equivalent to the Islamic concept of a *Din*), and were looking for answer to any conceivable question which could be raised. They were seeking to explain the world in all its aspects with the ultimate aim of presenting a picture of the "Good Life" for mankind.

In retrospect, against the background of the historical development of philosophy and its differentiation unto various branches, these early philosophers seem to have taken onto themselves a quite formidable task. Using contemporary categories, for instance, Aristotle's works alone contain treatise on ethics, political theory, logic, epistemology, and natural science. Indeed, one of the reasons why many modern philosophers are so self-conscious about their role is that, over the centuries, the philosophical enterprise has been continuously differentiated and refined as its mainstream

brought forth various offspring's under the labels of theology, history, psychology, physiology, physics and the other sciences. Since then of course, these offspring's have been reclaimed as philosophers and turned their attention to a "second order" level and to the inquiries undertaken and these "first order" activities. As a result, we now have established bodies of knowledge in the area of philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, so it can be seen that mantle of Hume's "humble skeptics", or Locke's under-laborers", on the part of modern philosophical has done nothing to narrow its field of attention or to restrict its object of study. Moreover, the various constitutive branch of philosophy which are the foundation of all areas of inquiry – epistemology, ethics, logic, metaphysics and aesthetics –are as alive and flourishing as they were in the days of the ancient Greeks and continue to bring forth fruitful philosophical ideas. However, it remains the case that contemporary philosophizing is distinctly different from philosophy of the ancient Greeks (though there are, of course, many points of similarity) and to define the scope of modern philosophy fully, we must look at the consequences of the introduction of the analytic approach into philosophical reasoning and following general practice in this sphere, these are best illustrated by demonstrating the differences between philosophical and non-philosophical problems.

Chapter 4

Philosophical and Non-Philosophical Problems

Russell, B. (1946) once described philosophy as operating in a kind of “no-man’s land” between the area of “definite knowledge” (science) and “dogma” or what claims to surpass knowledge (theology), and this rather cryptic explanation does serve to draw attention to one central feature of the philosophical endeavor. The questions with which philosophers are concerned are different in kind from those which exercise the minds of physicists, historians, astronomers and other scientists. The difference is usually expressed in terms of the philosophers concerns with a priori question (i.e. “question which can be answered without recourse to material experience) as against the scientist empirical investigations of phenomena. The physicists, for example, will set up experiment in order to test his hypothesis about sub-atomic structures in other words; he attempts to answer the questions posed in his discipline by “going and seeing”. The philosopher, on the other hand, considering question about the validity of knowledge or about morals cannot “go and see” in this way. He cannot test his ideas in a concrete empirical way but must rely on the process of reflection, logical analysis and rational argument. This activity will often, of course, require an examination of the empirical data of the sciences, but it remains the case that the philosopher’s speculations must move beyond the concrete world of direct experience if his questions about the nature of truth or the status of our knowledge are to be satisfactorily answered. This speculative function has been a traditional

feature of philosophical work and, in recent times, the introduction of linguistic techniques has brought a greater precision to the process. It is sometimes said that modern philosophers tend to be preoccupied with language, but this rather bald statement can be misleading in a number of ways. In the first place, there is a sense in which the examination of language has always figured in philosophical activity. Thinkers, as wide apart as Socrates, Hobbes and Hume, have expressed a lively interest in the way words and concepts are used in ordinary language and have taken this usage into account in their treatment of philosophical problems. In addition, this linguistic approach can be misunderstood if it is not clearly explained and viewed against the background of the traditional subject matter of philosophy.

Philosophers are interested in language because it is through the medium of language that problems are posed and solutions put forward. It is by means of language that we describe the world and structure every facet of our sense experiences. Danto refers to the area of philosophical attention as the space “between language and the world” and in this way he wishes to stress the fact that many philosophical problems, for instance the problems surrounding appearance and reality, arise in attempts to accurately describe and account for the physical state of affairs which we see around us. Philosophy is thus interested in the correspondence between what is experienced in the world and our description of that experience. If confusion and impression are present in the language we use to describe our sense experiences, then it is only to be expected that corresponding problems and areas of puzzlement will

result. An important part of the philosophical endeavor then, is the elimination of confusion and the fostering of understanding by paying close attention to the way in which words and concepts are used in different spheres of discourse.

One of the central tasks of philosophy was, to help us escape the “bewitchment” of our intelligence by means of language”. It is important to note that words have no essential meaning outside the uses to which we put them, and that there are as many as uses as there are contexts of human intercourse and communication. There is a crucial distinction to be drawn between descriptive and evaluate language. The former states facts and the latter expresses value judgments. In addition, it is essential to discern the subtleties of difference between concepts of various kinds, for instance, between “teaching” and “instructing” and between “education” and “training”. This clinical and rigorous approach to language and its uses which is provided by contemporary philosophy thus helps to bring a greater sophistication and precision to the traditional and perennial problems of the domain of philosophy.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: The Value Of Philosophical Analysis

The examination of certain aspects of the Nigerian educational system against the background of the concepts of education and needs and interest and the analysis of arguments associated with them have served to illustrate the importance of the analytic techniques in the philosophy of education. Terms must be clearly defined, arguments closely analyzed and factual statements separated from evaluative statements before any serious consideration of educational claims and judgments can take place. Educational discourse cannot proceed until ambiguity and imprecision have been eradicated.

Philosophical analysis is thus, a principal weapon in the armory of the philosopher of education and its application can be of enduring assistance to education students, teachers, professional educators and administrators.

It is very obvious that philosophy of education is wide and cannot be completed in this assignment write-up hence other areas of the course will be discussed in due course.

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