

Evaluating the dogma of religious epistemology within the scope of philosophy as epistemology in Nigeria

Anthony **Okpanachi**¹, Abubakar **Emeje**¹, Oluwagbenga **Olubisi**¹, Templeman **Abraham**², Dorcas **Okwute**¹ & Hamzath **Zuberu**²

¹ Department of Philosophy, Prince Abubakar Audu University,
Anyigba, Kogi State

²Department of History and International Studies,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State

Corresponding author: emejeyakubuabubakar@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper assesses the understanding of faith or religious faith as a received body of beliefs within the scope of philosophy as epistemology. It critiques the religious ideas and values we have come to accept and live by as a society. The paper espouses the relevance of philosophy as knowledge in an ever-increasing scientific and technological age, drawing implications thereof for religious practices and values (religious modes of knowledge, religious faith and epistemic claims associated with such) in Nigeria. Drawing on the eternal relevance of the humanities, especially the discipline of philosophy, the paper demonstrates that many values and practices within our social world demand constant interrogation and examination. As such, this reflection establishes that, contrary to the view that philosophy offers little or nothing or misguided fears of its corrosive nature, of its corrosive nature – when properly understood – philosophy can, in fact, be of immense value to our society especially in checking the excesses of religious epistemic/knowledge claims which are at the root of

many decisions and actions of people who hold such dominant views thereby impacting negatively on societal development. The paper adopts the critico-analytic method to analyse data obtained from various sources to undertake this reflection.

Keywords: Philosophy, religion, religious epistemology, epistemic claims, science and technology.

Introduction

Philosophy, properly understood as capable of promoting a culture of intellectual debate in and outside the university environment, with plenty of dividends for the larger society, is here defended. The idea of a viable philosophy as one that stretches beyond armchair analysis, which encourages training in rationality that is not too abstract and distant from practical realities, is advocated as capable of enhancing the intellectual and theoretical disposition to deal with the hypersensitivity of the public sphere in Nigeria to religious issues and debates. Mazyar (1999) and Al- Attas (2001), while exploring similar exercises in Islamic contexts, provide useful insights. The ability to interrogate, interact, and engage with religious matters/and or non-religious issues dispassionately can be further developed and fostered deeply in Nigeria through the teaching of philosophy as a core discipline within the humanities. That

philosophy continues to play critical roles in the lives of individuals and societies world over is noteworthy and even more so in contemporary times when the various media platforms are sites for promotion and propagation of views, values, and debates that can undermine the gains of modernity and humanistic civilisation in many ways. This important role, though recognised in the basic curriculum requirements for universities in Nigeria with the teaching of philosophy and logic, history and philosophy of science, constitutive of the General Studies pre-requisite for university education, is more often than not adequately delivered to the extent required. While reflecting on how the humanities disciplines can deliver for the fourth industrial revolution, Broadbent states, "... part of the problem is that the way humanities disciplines are taught at many universities does not lend itself to ready engagement with a changed and changing world", (Broadbent, 2018, Para.

5). For example, philosophy as a discipline and course of study is not studied and promoted in many universities in Nigeria, and so, this weakens the philosophical culture necessary for the accommodation of different religious and critical perspectives in the public domain. This is disturbing as it is retrogressive in a number of ways, as training in rational deliberative engagements on critical issues of life and societal development is also crucial for the place and role of religion in the public sphere. The problem becomes more complicated with less and less critically minded educated citizenry whose fate hangs in the balance of religious leaders with views, messages and values that continue to hamper people from taking responsibilities in the public domain. The consequences range from the promotion of what philosophy is not, to unquestioning/gullible people at the mercy of religious and populist/propagandist manipulators. Thus, the Marxian dictum that 'religion is the opium of the masses' resonates strongly in this context. Against this backdrop, this paper sets out to evaluate religious epistemology in Nigeria and the role of a viable philosophy in the project of enthroning a much-needed dialectical culture across the polity.

Definition of terms

It is very important to provide a brief clarification of the meaning associated with some basic operational concepts used in this paper. These terms to be clarified include: dogma, epistemology, religious epistemology, and religion. Dogma is often associated with religion or politics, and it means authoritative sets of tenets and beliefs that are considered fundamentally true and therefore, held unquestionably by adherents. Its other element includes some form of rigidity. Epistemology is one of the basic branches of philosophy, generally concerned with the origin, nature, scope and possibility of knowledge. It is interested in asking the fundamental question of how sure we are as regards what we claim to know. When this branch of philosophy is applied to the religious context, we then derive the phrase: religious epistemology, which accounts for the dispositional outlook of religious claims, beliefs, and items of faith with respect to their knowledge status and warrant of religious beliefs held by adherents. Finally, religion is a very broad term that involves a system of beliefs and practices or worldviews people hold that connect them with nature, the divine, the sacred or the

supernatural. It often includes rituals, mores of a moral kind and a variety of claims of explanations for existence.

Problematising the discourse: exploiting religion both as a means and as an end

The paper seeks to show the place and role of the humanities as disciplines at this auspicious time of the fourth wave of information and technological revolution (Juma, 2014; see also discussions on the need for universities in Africa to reinvent themselves to meet the needs of the changed and changing times). The paper attempts this from the observation that the needs of people and the burden of human civilisation continue to show that religion and religious needs are unlikely to disappear anytime soon, even in the face of widespread dominance and transformative impact of science and technology. However, claims of religious knowledge and purported powers arising from such continue to inform and influence the actions and inactions of religious people around the world, with far-reaching implications not only for such religious adherents but also for the larger society. One of the many important locations where religion and religious claims are prevalent is Nigeria, and more broadly, Africa. Moreover, the increasing

scale of migration from the continent to other parts of the world further underscores the significance of this subject as an important area of scholarly reflection.

The role of religion seems very important in the Nigerian context, such that one is hardly ever confronted with some critical reflections, and so has made religion such an important phenomenon in Nigeria. This may be because of the government's elevation of religion/religious issues to the public domain, even though constitutionally, Nigeria is referred to as a secular nation. Those in government and those outside government circle in desperate bids to rally and curry support and score cheap points are seen to wantonly play the religious card as it has become one of the fault lines of our national life. In fact, religion has become many things to us in Nigeria, as once 'religion' is introduced in many transactions, Nigerians are likely to accept everything 'hook, line and sinker'. On the one hand, it is one of the major considerations in the negotiation and struggle for political power, as is evident in the public display of religious fervour by the political class. Evidence of this abounds where the political class are

seen publicly displaying their religious fervour (Obadare, 2019; Blench & Dendo, 2003). At the risk of sounding judgmental, many do so without sincerity of purpose and commitment to the values of truth and justice; if not, how does one resolve the conundrum of the persistent rise in corruption in Nigeria despite its high sense of religiosity among its inhabitants? It has on the other hand become source of consolation for the majority of the deprived and powerless on the other hand, (Gifford, 2015, p.4). The consequences include, but are not exhaustive: the exploration and exploitation of religion to serve as a means to holding on to power, while encouraging people that power is given by some divine arrangement. The logic of this so-called divine favour or arrangement serves as a smokescreen to conceal systemic manipulations involved in the negotiations for power, the perpetrators and their exclusive advantages. Religious leaders, in turn, often become extensions of these power structures, providing spiritual validation and guidance, depending on their perceived prophetic or spiritual authority, to both those in power and those seeking power. This has led to a kind of competitive struggle among religious

leaders, who increasingly engage in efforts to enhance their perceived spiritual insight and foresight. The reports of these have heightened growing reports of so-called 'men of God' involved in human sacrifice and other occultic practices in Nigeria (Uroka, 2023). On the part of the many deprived and frustrated populace, religion is used as a coping and survival strategy informed by the nature of sermons and messages believers get in their various religious centres on worship programmes. Hence, it is not uncommon to notice the proliferation of several religious centres, often marked by a crisis of nomenclature, in Nigeria. In the face of very frustrating and excruciating experiences of poverty, disease, insecurity and joblessness as a result of poor and irresponsible leadership at all levels, there seems to be a growing tendency to seek consolation, succour and comfort in religion with its alluring messages of hope, sometimes problematic for the mental attitude that can really transform the people and society. The crisis is compounded as these religious centres become a fast means of achieving social relevance and financial empire; consequently, the influence and power of religious leaders expand, often through means that further impoverish and

marginalise already vulnerable Nigerians. The state of religious knowledge in Nigeria is often characterised by gullibility and an uncritical acceptance of claims, especially when they are associated with so-called 'divine authority' or religious name-calling used as a cover.

And of course, some epistemic claims of religious nature emanating thereof are never deeply reflected upon by many Nigerians. Thus, the majority of the population is exploited as the people become further docile, disempowered, and live falsely hoping for a better tomorrow (which hardly comes in Nigeria). A careful conclusion about religion in action, as manifest in these manipulations, is that Karl Marx is right to say that 'religion is the opium of the masses', which is evident in the Nigerian context. Thus, all sorts of supposedly condemnable acts by religion are perpetrated. Indeed, religion has become a paradoxical phenomenon in Nigeria with respect to the justification provided for the ends to which it is employed by religious leaders and followers of these religions within and outside government, in both the private and public spheres. The concern here is to evaluate the

question of knowledge and the normative issues in religion and to align them with the values of probing, questioning and critical assessment for which philosophy is known. Questions of interest include: how can the knowledge of these religious matters be assessed in relation to their impact on the Nigerian polity? How can this knowledge be appropriated for the advancement of society, and not encourage the destruction of society as currently seems to be the case? What role can philosophy play in how the values of the transcendental/divine/supernatural Being enhance and be enhanced for the overall reconstruction of a much more humane society in Nigeria?

Reflecting on these sorts of questions and more may have influenced the work titled *Why Beliefs Matter* by Davies. In this work, Davies (2010, p. 188) shows how if you truly believe in your own worldview, you cannot easily entertain a radically different one; however, if you genuinely try to find out why another person, of considerable intelligence, holds the beliefs, one might hope to identify issues that they can be persuaded to reconsider or that you might want to reconsider. The alternative to patient discussion is

confrontation, often by a mixture of tendentious arguments and ridicule.

Reflections on religious epistemology in Nigeria and its problems

The goal here is simply to specify how religious beliefs can (or cannot) warrant credulity. Thus, I will, as much as possible, avoid the controversies in general epistemology that identify controversies surrounding the nature of beliefs generally and sources of knowledge. This is by no means a denial of their relationship with the present project. The reason is that the authors are interested in looking at how these religious beliefs relate to the Nigerian situation, which seems quite peculiar. For example, why is it the case that harnessing resources for the construction of religious infrastructure seems prioritised over the construction of educational facilities in environments where the rate of education is abysmally low and poor? For example, it was widely reported in 2019 how Jigawa state, heavily ravaged by the menace of Boko Haram, planned to build 95 mosques across the state (Premium Times, 2019).

The epistemic claims and counterclaims, often divinely motivated, create a

competitive scenario of discordant voices. Which is which? Or, which should be taken to be the real/genuine and representative, and so should become operational in determining the rule by which people conduct their lives and affairs, is what raises questions of religious epistemology. Clark (2009), in the work *Religious Epistemology*, discusses the various nuances in the works of the proponents in this area of philosophical thought, highlighting the complexity of epistemological issues regarding matters of religious beliefs and religious truths. The questions as regards whether or not it is reasonable or rational to believe in a Supreme Being and whether there is evidence as such or not do not really arise within the religious experiences in the Nigerian context. To be seen to have some form of belief in some Supernatural being is taken for granted. In fact, what is more important here is how these claims are (not) understood, interpreted, transmitted, responded to and appropriated. To belabour philosophical details as pursued by Clark is not immediately of interest; suffice it to note a point made by Clark, which is significant to the place of a viable philosophy in religious matters in Nigeria. Thus, the authors insist that the rational

project of the evidential view on religious truth is one that there is "trust in the deliverances of reason, seek supporting evidence, and be open to contrary evidence" (Clark, 2009, p. 2). This admonition recognises the reality of human fallibility in the scheme of religion and underscores the responsibility of believers to remain critically aware of this limitation. Hence, the need for constant attempts at negotiation and deliberation, even within and outside an individual and in a broader social context I, in responding to matters of religious knowledge. By this supposition, individuals are challenged to deploy their rational capacities to reflect on matters of a religious nature. The idea here is not to introduce the long tension between faith and reason because, as indicated, the focus is on estimating the extent to which epistemic claims of religious nature can be engaged with reflective and engaging minds to whittle down the undue excesses of these claims and their burden thereof. How controversial is the position that questioning is an important tool in the project of philosophy to reign in the excesses of religion in Nigeria? The authors will quickly share a few experiences of how philosophy is

perceived and its role in the construction of the minds of the citizenry.

On philosophy as epistemology and some "Mis"conceptualisations in Nigeria

On initial interactions with people for the first time who ask the course one studies and get told 'philosophy', there is always some second look, which usually suggests reservations informed by mixed valuations of what the prevailing conceptions of philosophy are.

Interestingly, some of the time, the views seem largely suspicious and negative. Thus, there abounds a daunting task of explaining the possibility that one's study of philosophy does not spell doom for one's cherished religious faith, belief, and values. Rather, philosophy can serve as a harmless friend and ally to the religious sensibility, as many exponents in philosophy of religion, such as Alvin Plantinga, John Hick, amongst others, have shown.

The burden of proof and consistency of trust is continuously challenged in subtle manners whenever issues become the subject of argument, and one gets into some philosophical exploration of these issues, there is always the response that 'please, I don't want to argue with a

philosopher'. So interesting, and indeed there are no apologies for carrying out the task for which philosophers and teachers of philosophy around the world make meaning and earn their living too.

Given the foregoing picture, mentioning the word 'philosophy' is sometimes enough to put many people off. So, the concern and task therefore implies how philosophy can contribute to changing its image as a discipline whose penchant for all kinds of dangerous arguments can be better understood and appreciated in a much more positive light? This is by no means an attempt to divorce argument from the discipline of philosophy, but a self-image laundering as per argument and its place in philosophy. In this regard, the recommendation of Cohen in changing the model of argument seems apt, handy and perhaps can help transform the image of philosophy both workers and students of philosophy embody. Cohen (2013), in a *YouTube* presentation, is of the view that argument is fundamental to philosophy, and there are three models of argument: viz., the dialectical, the proof, and the performative. Of these three models, the dialectical model is rather popular and widely used in most contexts. It has a

combative and war-like picture with corrosive effects on deliberation, negotiation, compromise, and collaboration. It, in fact, contrasts winning and losing and thus obscures the possibility that even the so-called loser may benefit cognitively from the exchange. Thus, Cohen concludes that to make for a positive image of argument (representing philosophy as knowledge), it is important to change the kind of entrants into the argument context. Cohen calls for a new set of arguers who can imagine themselves as being all components in an argument situation; that is, proponent, opponent, audience, judges, and even be able to imagine themselves as potential losers. For by so doing, one can have a good argument that will not have negative effects on negotiation, compromise, or deliberation. In other words, when the imaginative transformation of what philosophy as argument means, participants in the argument context can visualise and imagine themselves in new ways that make it more rewarding and enriching, even as losers and winners in a discussion.

For obvious reasons, as a course and as a discipline, it is capable of breeding

restless and curious-minded people whose stock-in-trade can undermine the social and religious status quo, especially of a culturally and religiously conservative one; consequently, it has remained largely suspect. It is not lost on the authors that the overwhelming influences of these pervasive social, cultural and religious beliefs, values and sentiments have direct relevance for the entire country in a number of ways. On this note, Akinwale, while reflecting on the quality of education in Nigeria, holds a strong view that education is in chains and thus in need of liberation. There is therefore no question that this liberatory aspiration can be realised in part by drawing on the rich tradition of philosophy that, unfortunately, is not promoted in many universities in northern Nigeria, as also is the case in some other countries in Africa, like the Republic of Chad, identified by the same author (Akinwale, 2013). As a demonstration of what philosophy can contribute to the situation, UNESCO realises and underlines the value of philosophy for the development of human thought, for each culture and for each individual by setting aside the third Thursday in November each year as World Philosophy Day. The relevance of a

philosophical culture is predicated on the role it can play in a society that serves as a melting pot of religious and cultural traditions, where questions surrounding Western education remain contentious in certain parts of Nigeria. For example, the Boko Haram ideology claims that Western education is a misnomer. Again, that philosophy is parochially seen as part of the Christian heritage and injurious to the tenets of religion; efforts have to be redoubled by the authorities concerned to rein in such excesses. There is also the unfortunate reductive thinking that philosophy is synonymous with atheism. The fundamentalist tendencies to which religious affiliations and religious epistemic claims are capable of breeding make it imperative for the search for a rational culture deployed through all the rungs of education to counter some of these excesses for the good of society.

Philosophy, properly understood, is to be embraced and celebrated; after all, criticisms and questioning are not always employed to achieve destructive ends. They can indeed be constructive evaluations and deep reflections on religious, cultural, epistemological, political and scientific beliefs. As indicated, questioning is key in the

project of critical inquiry, serving as an antidote to dogmatic and fundamentalist attachment to certain knowledge claims or beliefs. Bertrand Russell, as quoted in Ihuah, stated thus:

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 its highest good. (Ihuah, 2010. para. 6)

Ikuenobe (2001) discusses the experience of Socrates and how intellectual alertness can be characterised by the use of questioning as an indispensable asset in philosophy. When conceived in the right manner, it serves a useful intellectual purpose of encouraging a disposition that is persistently open to inquiry, learning and acquisition of knowledge. Hence, the value of philosophy cannot be overemphasised.

Philosophy as a course and discipline of study for critical mass of people: A neglected national asset in Nigeria?

Philosophy is the critical study of general and basic principles of all that there is. It can therefore be seen as the critical scrutiny of the values and ideals we live by. It involves the rational evaluation of the truth and principles of being, knowledge and action. It seeks to examine and expose the pretensions and presuppositions that undergird our scientific and religious beliefs, through estimating the intelligibility of concepts by exposing them to crucibles of rationality to show the interrelatedness, implications and presuppositions. While the number of universities in Nigeria keeps increasing for many reasons, largely political, especially in the case of

government-established universities in each state as a means of sharing the so-called 'national cake', and creating employment opportunities for a mass of people. This has some advantages and disadvantages. While it is a worthwhile venture to provide avenues for the education of people, given the slim opportunities for university admission seekers, the ultimate and fundamental factors are not properly examined and rationally addressed. For one, funding has been a major challenge for existing universities and has been at the basis of the near collapse of the university education in Nigeria, as incessant strikes tend to disrupt the university system to the extent that they appear to have become a culture and a tradition and part of the university system in Nigeria.

University education is a strategic institution with peculiar roles and constitutes a special investment in the life of a nation. While the focus is not on the university and its place in the Nigerian society per se, suffice it to note that how this is seen and operates in Nigeria leaves so much to be desired. There has been an exponential increase in the number of private universities with individuals as sole proprietors or religious

bodies as proprietors of some of these institutions of higher learning. While it is not out of place for the investors to derive benefits from their investment, it is crucial to insist on the quality and standard of a national culture that philosophy, as a course or discipline, is fundamentally capable of inculcating and inspiring in those who train and study in these institutions. That said, it is noteworthy to remark that philosophy as a course and department does not enjoy serious patronage and support in some of these private universities in Nigeria, apart from a tokenistic approach towards it and a few of these universities in Eastern Nigeria, where there is substantial emphasis on philosophy and related disciplines of the liberal arts.

In the last few years in Nigeria, there have been some efforts to review the nature of university education in a way and manner that can get several graduates to gradually begin to forget about white-collar jobs that are not readily available in Nigeria. To this end, there were massive awareness campaigns and symposia on redefining the aspirations and culture of certification with respect to white-collar jobs. As a fallout of these, all the universities have

established or are in the process of establishing entrepreneurship courses that can advance the cause of these goals to make university graduates more enterprising as potential employers of labour and creators of jobs. The attention paid to this crisis of creating entrepreneurs rather than job seekers for jobs that are hardly available demonstrates clearly how, when a people and a nation realise the very importance of a discipline in addressing an urgent need, or problem, the government, people, and its educational institutions can address it accordingly.

In light of the foregoing, therefore, it seems safe to claim that philosophy and its usefulness to the national culture and values are yet to be realised. Until that phase is crossed, the fate of philosophy in Nigeria will remain in the balance. In some climes, at A levels, philosophy and ethical courses are taught. In the UK, for instance, there is a conscious appreciation of these courses even at A levels. The meaning is that there is an awareness of this discipline, and students deliberately make their choices in terms of what courses they so wish to study, depending on their career choices and options, accompanied by the right

support system. In Nigerian educational institutions, not good publicity and limited access and consideration are given to philosophy or philosophy-related courses, except, of course, in very few higher institutions and particularly, universities where these happen. In fact, some higher institutions that provide A-level educational services have no place for philosophy or its related disciplines in ethics, save for some courses usually designed around citizenship studies. All of these cumulatively reflect on the prospects for the discipline of philosophy and how it is appreciated in society.

In the federal universities in Nigeria, which are now present in all the 36 states of Nigeria, philosophy as a course and a department is not a well-publicised discipline. In fact, it is on good authority that the farthest north, where philosophy is co-mixed with religious studies, are the Universities of Abuja and Jos and the newly developed Philosophy of Environment programme designed by a veteran philosopher in Nigeria, Professor Nwala Uzodinma, for Nassarawa State University. While at Ahmadu Bello University, there seems to be an excess of history over philosophy in the department of philosophy. The implication is that in

remaining universities across the northern axis of Nigeria, philosophy is not offered as a discipline in its own departmental right with full emphasis on what philosophy is or even co-mixed as it is popularly done in several other universities in other parts of Nigeria. One point needs to be made clear, that this practice and tradition leaves the impression that there is a conscious attempt to keep philosophy from the mainstream of the intellectual heritage of what it can offer, along with other disciplines, in these universities and society at large.

Beyond the misunderstood role of philosophy in our personal and national life and the campaign to keep it in check, philosophy, as taught as a requirement just for a single semester encounter (either Philosophy and Logic or History and Philosophy of Science) as stipulated under the General Studies Courses by the National Universities' Commission (NUC), is mostly taught by instructors whose background in philosophy is not adequate and robust. This is a result of the basic principle that one cannot give what one does not have. For if philosophy is not offered as a course or discipline with its own department, and these universities

are required to implement the NUC's regulation, these universities are therefore compelled to use what they have, who indeed are partly drawn from the biological sciences and history departments to teach the history and philosophy of science while those from religious departments or politics are usually drafted to undertake the teaching of philosophy and logic courses. Given the characteristic nature of the population challenge of many universities in Nigeria, and the fact that philosophy is taught merely as a semester course, students are not well disposed and foregrounded in the details of philosophy. The implication is that the delivery of these courses may be haphazardly done with little or no attention to the substantial attention that philosophy demands. The result is that the poor image of philosophy in public is further deepened, and of course, the motivations for furthering interest in philosophical reflection are diminished, as many hardly see the relevance of philosophy; after all, it is not a unique department with its own students and professionals teaching philosophy. The end result is that the attitude towards the entire philosophical project seems merely to fulfil institutional requirements, and so

philosophy, society and people are done a great disservice.

The import of excluding philosophy seems to demonstrate a power game matrix that is sustained on an anti-intellectual culture in Nigeria. An example of this is seen in some countries in Africa, where the ruling elites with their religious sentiments have very strong reservations about the discipline of philosophy. For instance, Akinwale observes that:

in the neighbouring country of Chad, there is only one university. In that university, the teaching of philosophy is not allowed. As a young Chadian and you wish to study Philosophy, you either go outside Chad or enrol in a Catholic Seminary. But why enrol in a Catholic Seminary if you are not studying for the priesthood? In any case, Philosophy can breed political turbulence. It can create a volatile society where people begin to question the usual way of thinking, the usual way of doing things. To allow the teaching of Philosophy is to pave the way for the emergence of Chadian versions of Socrates,

Aristotle, Thomas More, etc. But you do not need to cross the north-eastern border of Nigeria to go to Chad. In virtually all our government-run universities in the north of Nigeria, Philosophy is conspicuously missing from the curriculum. Philosophy questions power, and rightly so, Akinwale concludes. (Akinwale, 2013, p. 84-85)

The exercise of political power in many sub-Saharan African countries has not adequately incorporated the critical input of citizens, resulting in poor governance outcomes, largely attributable to unaccountable leadership. The consequences of the failure of political power are directly evident in the dwindling fortunes of many countries in Africa, especially Nigeria.

The situation is not made any better with the flight to whatever is on offer on religious platforms. Hence, this reflection on how claims of religious nature can be subjected to the scrutiny of a rationally motivated mind, with the aim of enhancing people's ability to distinguish between charlatans and sincere adherents of religion and to approach

religion for what it is. For people to begin to realise and appreciate their potential to cause change in societies, the role of philosophy is important. The acknowledgement and teaching of philosophy as a discipline and course in educational institutions is not negotiable. However, one other means to popularise philosophy and bring to bear on general societal problems in the media that the already educated people appreciate. I will make allusion to some concerted effort by a teacher of philosophy in Nigeria to underscore the Socratic dictum of 'an unexamined life is not worth living' among the public beyond teaching philosophy as a course in the university classroom. This implies some constant attempt to rationally and scientifically assess our values, attitudes, and practices, policies as a people and as a nation.

The question of how the Nigerian brand of religion affects the entire Nigerian society has been a topical engagement for this Socratic philosopher in Nigeria of some sort. While the authors may not share the theistic reservations of Professor Douglas Anele, an avowed self-proclaimed atheist who teaches philosophy in university of Lagos, Nigeria,

it is understandable to agree with him on the ends to which religion as practised in Nigeria affects the nation negatively. For well over a decade now, his commitment to popularising philosophy has seen well-articulated arguments on some fundamental issues of philosophy, the complicit role of religion, especially as it seeks to deepen dogmatic and unquestioning mentality at the expense of a rational and scientific engaging attitude that can take a people and nation out of the doldrums of underdevelopment. This philosopher has done this, through public intellectual engagement, particularly in newspapers (especially the Vanguard Nigeria Paper with a series in various columns). For instance, in an interview he granted in 2013, Anele argues that religion is one of the major problems of Nigeria, next to corruption. He goes ahead to insist that religion teaches discrimination, fear, hypocrisy and inculcates psychological dissonance. At the intellectual and psychological level, the ideas of God, Heaven and Hell are doing serious damage in Nigeria. He argues that this affects Nigeria economically, as many Nigerians spend many productive hours in religious activities. Pastors are buying up warehouses in Nigeria where there should

be goods and factories. For him and others, and rightly so, the decay in the manufacturing industry in Nigeria is proportionate to the rise of Pentecostal Christianity. Very interestingly, in a piece published in April 2014, Anele forcefully shows the link between religion and underdeveloped Nigeria, thus:

it is almost impossible to discuss rationally the difficult challenges of contemporary Nigeria with the average Nigerian without the latter expressing total reliance on the inexorability of divine intervention in the fullness of time. A generation fed continuously with the diet of religious superstition, as is the case presently, can hardly incubate the critical mass of creative and bold minds capable of generating imaginative ideas and implementing them for positive social transformation. Devotion to the teachings of Islam and Christianity, usually distorted by power-hungry, sexually perverted materialistic

preachers and evangelists, leads to cognitive dissonance and all sorts of mental disorientation. (Anele, 2014)

Anele further continues:

in Nigeria, despite the marvellous achievements of modern medicine, mentally disorganised religious leaders still believe that mere prayers and drinking of "holy water" and "anointed oil" can cure all diseases. The result of that antediluvian practice is thousands of undocumented deaths across the country. In the quotidian details of our daily lives, it makes all the difference if we approach issues with the critical attitude of science or the dogmatic attitude of religion. The one we adopt determines the way we see and interact with the world and with fellow human beings. I am convinced that unless a sizeable number of Nigerians step away from religious orthodoxy, or at least

cultivate a healthy dose of scepticism towards religion, it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the country to witness positive transformation in the foreseeable future. (2014)

The Anene's ideas touch significantly on how politics and politicisation of the force of religion represent some deficit for religion generally, as it affects Nigeria. In fact, the shamolic religious practices and hypocritical religious commitment grounded on diabolical pretensions have tainted the ideals of religion in both Islam and Christianity, as the two dominant religions in Nigeria. It is therefore not surprising that training in reflective engagement needs to be encouraged at all costs so as to make people consciously critical, analytical and ratiocinative, especially in matters of religious claims. With these values, the teaching of philosophy as a discipline by those whose training and expertise make them professionally competent to do so, will Nigerians be able to give to 'Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's'. Until philosophy takes its rightful place and the trained philosophers

assume their roles in the teaching of philosophy, only then will the consistent and appalling religious foolery that has become the order of the day in Nigeria be checked, and society be better for it.

A brief run-down of how philosophy has fared over several centuries vis-à-vis the development of societies is a pointer to the validity of the point in the foregoing. The civilisation that predated the Greco-Roman era was marked by the prevalence of a religious mentality that held the advancement of society back. When the Pre-Socratic cosmologists, Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes began the tradition of questioning to know the basic constituent from which the universe or reality was composed, the materialist thinking as foundational to the scientific culture of rationality and criticism was laid. It was almost lost to the prosperous Roman Empire that celebrated the slavery civilisation that had little or no place for rational engagement. The preservation of this intellectual culture in the Arabic literature that was later revived as a result of the translations into vernacular and the use of machines to replace human labour, coupled with the printing technology of the Renaissance era, led to

the widespread dissemination of this trend. This was the context within which modern science and philosophy emerged in the West, and the displacement of authority as validator of knowledge was epitomised and personified in the Church by the enthronement of reason and the empiricist culture as foundational to the modernist development world over today. Of course, one is familiar with all the debates that surround the claim that modern science happened in the West and not somewhere else. For example, Needham (1969), Sivin (1982), and Bala (2006) amongst many others, have demonstrated in their works how and why Western science developed in the West and not somewhere else. However, this is not the concern of this paper, as a detailed discussion of the issue would require an entirely separate study. While not undermining the place of the divine, it is the case that what humans can and should be responsible for cannot be shifted to some Supreme Being. After all, it is said colloquially, 'heaven help those who help themselves'. If Nigerians fail to help themselves to fix and deal with the issues we have all created for ourselves, no God will help solve them for them. Granted that Nigerians have been endowed with human and material

resources, why then should they defer this responsibility? Within this context, the role of philosophy cannot be overemphasised.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to show how philosophy as epistemology and religion in certain contexts can be complementary partners rather than competitive rivals. Reflective or critical mindedness is important in every facet of human endeavour within religion, culture, and other areas of life. The capacity of philosophy to enhance and develop this critical consciousness is not debatable. Training in argumentative and engaging abilities of the discipline of philosophy and the resulting impact on several values of people and society has sometimes led to the reservations many have for the discipline. In spite of this, philosophy, when properly understood for what it is in its classical Socratic sense, as underlined in this paper, has a very relevant role in the affairs of life. Should religious epistemological claims, especially as they affect Nigeria, be immune from a questioning mind? My response and conclusion are 'No'. The significant role of philosophy in cultivating this attitude has been the

age-old heritage of philosophy to all human civilisations. If indeed, the very origin of this disciplinary tradition is about a conscious attempt to ask and probe into nature and reality to appreciate the place of humans in it, then philosophy properly understood and given its rightful place in Nigeria can become a recipe for transforming the unreflective religious epistemological regime prevalent in Nigeria. In fact, the wanton abdication of personal and agential responsibility in matters of self and national life to religious trappings is central to what a viable philosophy can challenge and change by promoting a culture of constructive engagement among citizens. Dealing with personal and interpersonal problems requires a

culture of deliberative engagement, which philosophy, when taught by the right people in the right environment, can hasten dispassionate engagement, harmonious cooperation and mutual social existence among diverse people with diverse religious backgrounds in an ever interdependent and multicultural/multi-religious world. Such that the uncritical mental outlook that inadvertently promotes exploitative religiosity and unquestioned claims and counter-claims of truth, fake news, falsehood and of course their negative impact can be curtailed and checked when basic tools of philosophy are deployed even by the simplest philosophically educated minds.

ORCID

Anthony Okpanachi: Orcid no: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3924-2510>

Abubakar Emeje: Orcid no: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1036-847X>

Stephen Olubisi1: Orcid no: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1711-1943>

Templeman Abraham: Orcid no: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1974-6211>

Dorcas Okwute: Orcid no: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2404-0453>

Hamzath Zuberu: Orcid no: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4669-9005>

References

- Akinwale, A. (2013). Knowledge, power and the state of university education in Nigeria. In Oyeshile Olatunji & Joseph Kenny (Eds.). *The Idea of a Nigerian University: A Revisit*. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (2001). *Prolegomena to the metaphysics of Islam*. International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Anele, D. (2013, November 18). *Says there no God, no heaven and no hell*.
<http://www.skyrocketnews.com/features/douglas-anele-says-no-god-no-heaven-andno-hell-meet-him-in-this-interview/>.
- Anele, D. (2014, October 12). *Anti-intellectual character of Nigerians*.
<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/04/anti-intellectual-character-nigerians-2/#sthash.Ljxz4n7n.dpuf>
- Anele, D. (2014, October 12). *How religion underdeveloped Nigeria*.
<http://samolueexpress.co.uk/douglas-anele-religion-underdeveloped-nigeria-4/#.UOrmLvldXul>
- Bala, A. (2006). *The dialogue of civilisations in the birth of modern science*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Broadbent, A. (2018). How humanities can deliver for the fourth industrial revolution.
http://theconversation/how-the-humnaities-can-deliver-for-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-101868?utm=email&utm_campaign=the...
- Clark, K. J. (2009). *Religious Epistemology*. In B. Dowden & J. Feiser (Eds.). *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/relig-ep/> on 30/04/2014.
- Cohen, H. D. (2013, July 10). "For argument's sake". TED Talk recorded by TEDxColby College. www.tedxtalk.org
- Davies, B. (2010). *Why beliefs matter: Reflections on the nature of science*. Oxford University Press.
- Blench, R., & Dendo, M. (2003). *The dimensions of ethnicity, language and culture in Nigeria* (Position Paper for DFID Nigeria: Drivers of Change, Component 3, Output 28). Roger Blench
- Roger Blench. Gifford, P. (2015). *Christianity, development and modernity in Africa*. C. Hurst and Co. Publishers.

- Ihuah, A. (2010). *Why study philosophy: The parent discipline*. AuthorsDen. Ikuenobe, P. (2001). 'Questioning as an epistemic process of critical thinking', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 33, (3/4), 325-341.
- Ikuenobe, P. (2001). "Questioning as an epistemic process of critical thinking". *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 33 (3&4), 325-341.
- Juma, C. (2014). Reinventing African universities: African universities will become irrelevant if they do not focus on science and technology.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/09/reinventing-African-universities/2014959207677854.html>.
- UNESCO. (n.d.). *Learning to live together: Philosophy Day at UNESCO*.
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/most-programme/humanities-and-philosophy/philosophy-day-at-unesco/>
- Mazyar, L. (1999). *Technoscientific identities: Muslims and the culture of curiosity*. [PhD Dissertation, Rice University].
- Needham, J. (1969). *The Grand titration: science and society in East and West*. Toronto University Press.
- Obadare, E. (2018). *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the struggle for state and power in Nigeria*. Zed Books.
- Okpanachi, A.I (2018). *Karl popper's philosophy and the possibility of an African approach to science*. [PhD Dissertation, University of Hull].
- Premium Times. (2019, December 18). *Jigawa govt to build 95 mosques*.
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/368689-jigawa-govt-to-build-95-mosques.html>
- Sivin, N. (1982). Why scientific revolution did not take place in China or didn't it?, *Chinese Science*, 5, 45-66.
- Vanguard. (2017, September 2). *Why killings for rituals are on the increase in Nigeria*.
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/09/killings-rituals-increase-nigeria/>