

UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

IN THE SOCRATIC
TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION

The lecture, entitled “IN THE SOCRATIC TRADITION”, is the second in the series of the University of Port Harcourt inaugural lectures. Just as the first inaugural lecture, which was delivered by professor E.J Alagoa of the then school of humanities, inaugurate anything, following in his footsteps, so I do not in this lecture intend to inaugurate anything either. The reason Professor Alagoa gave then for not inaugurating anything was that he had been a Professor of history of several years before he was called upon to give an inaugural lecture. What was true in Professor Alagoa’s case is even truer in mine. Those closely acquainted with my academic career over the last twenty years will probably confirm that in Nigeria as a whole, I had unofficially been wearing the mantle of philosophy of education, my main discipline, long before I was appointed Professor and the first substantive dean of the then School of Education Studies (now the Faculty of Education), University of Port Harcourt in 1980.

If, that is to say, my **de facto** as distinct from my **de jure** chair had been inaugurated a long time ago, it seems important that I should, on this occasion of my **de jure** inaugural lecture, give an indication of what I have been professing all these years. Such an exercise will afford me the opportunity of restating what I consider to be the role of philosophy not only in the context of the academic study of education in particular, but also in the context of national development in general.

There is, however, a more fundamental sense in which this lecture cannot be said to be inaugurating anything. I neither inaugurated the Faculty of Education of this University nor, least of all did I at the macro level inaugurate the discipline, philosophy of education, which I profess. This discipline though a satellite one is an offspring of philosophy itself, which originated in ancient Greece in the 6th century B.C. indeed, the title of this lecture, provides a clue not only to my philosophical roots but also to an understanding of the role I have tried to play in the Nigerian context over the last twenty years. Furthermore, by adopting the said title, I am **ipso facto** declaring, and with apologies to none, that the

tradition of philosophy which I have been following is neither that of African traditional philosophy (Apostel 1981, Wiredu 1980) nor that of Islam, both of which are extant in Nigeria. The reason for this is as simple as it is obvious, namely, that for good or ill, the dominant system of education in Nigeria is neither the African (or Nigerian) traditional indigenous education nor Islamic education but, rather, the Western formal system of education. The philosophy of education which I profess is derived from the latter tradition rather than from the former ones, just as this inaugural lecture is part of a tradition which originated in medieval Europe.

In making the above declaration I am not implying that African traditional philosophy (better still, philosophies) and Islamic philosophy have had no relevance or significance in the context of the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian national synthesis. On the contrary, I agree with Professor Alagoa, as he pointed out in his inaugural lecture that “for the majority of people everywhere, the past merely lives on in their present without any special effort”- and this is the rub- either to comprehend it or to bring it in line with the living present. Since an essential task of philosophy has always been to comprehend all experience past and present, I have subjected the Nigerian past and present social aggregates, including the philosophies, to critical examination with a view to understanding their impacts, positive or negative, on national development. In doing so, one is merely following in the footsteps of Socrates who, long ago, warned his fellow Athenians that the unexamined life is not worth living.

If I may, therefore, anticipate the substance of this lecture, I should here point out that my role in Nigerian society in general, and in the academic educational context in particular, has been that of the critical philosopher. The ultimate aim of my teaching, research and publications over the year has been the critical examination of the principles, ideas and values of the indigenous cultures in juxtaposition with those of the dominant Western culture, (Nduka 1964) with a view to identify and advocating those principles and values that are conducive to the successful modernization of Nigerian society. More light will be thrown on this claim presently.

Meanwhile, without necessarily intending to blow one’s trumpet for the fun of it, I must at this point in time put in time put it on record that, had the so-called makers of Nigerian history over twenty-five years paid a little attention to what social critics, including my humble self, had been saying over the years, we might not have so many crashes along the highway of national development. Characteristically, as Professor Tekena Tamuno pointed out in his own inaugural lecture twelve years ago, Nigerians often regard themselves, and have more often jostled for the honour of being regarded, as making history, but seldom

ascertain what sort of history they have made. In the event, inspite of warnings and suggestions proffered in various publications and seminar papers, some of us have had to watch rather helplessly while the north/ south factor, the ethnicity factor, the religious factor, the population factor, the naira factor, ten percent factor and the barrel of the gun factor, among other factors, have resulted in the entrusting of the fortunes of this of this country and of different parts of it, so long and so often, into the hands of individuals of mediocre ability and stunned vision, sometimes even of doubtful integrity. Alas, if more care is not taken, I fear that there will still be more crashes along the highway of national development, so long as we continue in this day and age to run our national affairs on the basic of outmoded, unviable and contradictory ideas, principles and values.

Faced with the apparent ineffectiveness of the philosophical enterprise, one might be tempted to adopt the Marxist solution, since Marx admonished his followers that the important thing was not merely to interpret the world but to change it. Actually, the ineffectiveness referred to earlier is more apparent than real, since critical philosophy achieves rather indirectly and by different means the same type of end as Marx had in view. In different means the same type of end as Marx had in view. In performing the task of critical philosopher, I have drawn inspiration not only from my late parents and traditional background but also, and this is the crux of the matter, from the life and teaching of Socrates, the supreme heretic and the patron saint philosophy. Although philosophy has seen many changes over the centuries, has even been subjected to revolutionary impacts, (Ayer et al 1957), it seems to me that there is no better introduction to the romance and intellectual concerns of philosophy than a brief review of the character and teaching of Socrates, to which we now turn.

II

Philosophy and the Socratic legacy

Who, then, was Socrates? He was an Athenian who lived from 469-399 B.C. His life, therefore, spanned the period of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C) fought between the Athenian democracy and the Spartan military oligarchy. He also witnessed the atrocities perpetrated by the notorious Thirty Tyrants of Athens from 404-403 B.C. and, in the end, was condemned to death by the restored democracy in 399 B.C. In his life time Socrates practiced his vocation as a sculptor and performed patriotic duties by taking part in several military campaigns during the war in which he distinguished himself for courage and endurance. He also performed his civic duties by taking part in the deliberations of the Athenian Council, the highest legislative and judicial body in the city-state. Indeed, on one

memorable occasion, when the council was deliberation on a crucial judicial issue, he was the lone voice (out of a membership of 500) who opposed the illegality of the collective trial and execution of six generals after the naval battle of Arginusae in 406 B.C.

The circumstances of Socrates's life mentioned above are important not so much in themselves as for the light they throw on his character. Of far greater significance for gaining better understandings of the historical Socrates are the educational and intellectual circumstances of his time. Students of the history of education call the system of education the prevalent the new Athenian Education. The purveyors of the new education were the sophists. Many of them were learned and versatile, some were even polymaths, while some others were mere charlatans. They all claimed to be professors of practical wisdom and able to teach young men to be successful in life: above all, how to be successful in politics. They taught by lecturing and were paid handsome fees by the aristocratic and wealthy Athenian parents who were eager to prepare their sons for political leadership. The general tendency of the teaching of the sophists, which was rationalist in methods, was towards rationalism and agnosticism in belief. One of the greatest of the sophists, Protagoras, propounded the radical doctrine that man is the measure of all things, while others wondered whether the gods did or did not exist (Hammond 1959).

In the midst of the political, military, educational and intellectual ferment of 5th century Athens, there arose the philosopher, Socrates. No less rationalistic than the sophists, he compounded the intellectual revolt against the established social order and beliefs, which the teaching of the former represented, by undertaking an even more radical critique of both the social order and the superficially radical teaching of both the social order and the superficially radically teaching of the sophists. In the words of E.B. Castle, Socrates was only priests in the temple of reason (but also) a critic of the gods and a gadfly to men in high places, including the sophists and their wealthy and powerful patrons. For ruffling the intellectual feathers of the professional teachers, the sophists, whose mercenary pedagogy he held in contempt, and, worse still, for threatening to burst the socio-political balloon of the Athenian establishment with the pin-pricks of his rationalistic criticism, Socrates was impeached. He was accused, first, of not worshipping the gods of the city and, secondly, of corrupting the Athenian Youth. For reasons that are now obvious, Socrates was found guilty and was condemned to death.

In passing, one may mention that, in Nigeria, the nearest approach in recent times to such intolerance of criticism of the established other was represented by the famous Decree number 4 of 1984, now repealed.

In the court of history, it must be admitted that, although the then Athenian establishment and democracy survived to worship their gods while also corrupting the youth with worldly riches and the call to pursue success and riches by all means, they perished, as Barrows Dunham has pointed out, in immortal disgrace (Dunham 1965). The victim, Socrates, lived on to enlighten generations and centuries thereafter. For, as P.B. Shelley puts it

**Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory...**

But what was it that Socrates taught that earned him the death penalty? What has the teaching to do with philosophy? What, in fact is philosophy? To begin with the last question, philosophy has been defined as 'thought about thought'. This definition tallies with the view which regards philosophy as a second-order discipline capable of being applied to a variety of first-order disciplines and activities (Copleston 1980). For our purposes we could, following Sodipo, define philosophy as 'reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles we used to organize our experience in morals, in religion, in social and political life, in law, in psychology, in history, (sc.in education) and in the natural sciences' (Sodipo 1973). We need not at this juncture delve into the problem of establishing to what extent the philosophy activity is sui generis as compared with the pursuit of other disciplines such as the sciences or, say, history. Be that as it may, it should be noted that studies of such branches of philosophy as logic, epistemology, ethics and metaphysics have different times yielded insights which I have increased our understanding of man and his environment. In short, whereas 'scientist's aim is to find new truths, the philosopher's aim is to gain insight.' (Waismann 1956). It is precisely for this reason that, in the history of Western philosophy, Socrates, Descartes and Rousseau are regarded as among the most influential figures- the first for this ethical teaching, the second for his epistemology and metaphysics and the last for his social philosophy. Let us return to Socrates and his teaching.

Although it has been pointed out that much of Socrates' influence was due not so much to what he said as to the magnetic effect of his personality, the example of his life and death, and to the consistency and integrity with which he followed his own conscience, we also know that as a great teacher and philosopher his ideas were not only challenging but also revolutionary, indeed, subversive of the established order. Unlike the sophists who, for the appropriate fees, lectured on any subject under the sun and transmitted so-called knowledge, whose epistemological credentials were suspect, Socrates, without charging any fee, engaged all and sundry in philosophical discussions either in private houses, in the

street or in the market-place. He adopted the question-and-answer method, the famous Socratic Method, whose goal was the search for truth or true knowledge. A prerequisite for success in this search was the adoption of a certain attitude of mind, namely, intellectual humility. Unlike the sophists, the professional teachers who claim to know almost everything under the sun, Socrates professed his ignorance and was prepared to remedy it. What was more; he invited not only his fellow discussants but also the sophists and, indeed, all mankind to follow his example of intellectual humility. Predictably, the sophists as well as the Athenian socio-political establishment regarded Socrates's teaching and invitation as an unwarranted challenge to their authority, for, as Cowper later reminded us:

**Knowledge is proud that he has learned
so much**

Wisdom is humble that he knows not more.

As we shall see presently, Socrates's profession of ignorance, true or false, when in fact the Delphic oracle had declared him the wisest man in Greece, opened a new chapter in, gave mankind new insight into, mankind's age long quest for knowledge. It is, therefore, hardly a mere coincidence that, after the centuries old domination of the medieval intellectual world by scholasticism, the modern age of philosophy was inaugurated by Descartes, whose methodological doubt challenged, and contributed to the final overthrow of, the then dominant scholastic epistemology.

But it noted, however, that the sting in the tail of the apparently harmless or powerless question-and-answer exchanges conducted by Socrates consisted in the substantial philosophical issues he raised. In his quest for the definition of such terms as justice, courage, Piety, knowledge, virtue, and so on, he challenged the basic assumptions not only of his fellow-discussants in all matters of epistemology, religion, ethics, politics and metaphysics, but also those of Athenian society in general. Worse still, by the use of the famous Socratic method he demonstrated that what people called knowledge was not knowledge at all but a mass of confused, sometimes contradictory, ideas-intellectual debris that had to be cleared away if true knowledge was to be gained. This therapeutic function of philosophy was a task which Socrates performed with consummate skill and it remains one of his philosophical legacies.

But by far the most important and most influential contribution of Socrates to philosophy is his ethical teaching. Believing that the central problem of philosophy was the formulation of a rule of life, he proceeded to propound three closely related theses on the theme:

The first is the virtue is knowledge.

The second is that wrong doing can only be due to ignorance.

The third, and perhaps the most revolutionary doctrine of all, is that the care of the soul; is the most important duty of man:

That is to say, that all material considerations even life itself, should be subordinated to the claims of goodness, truth and understanding, for the perfection of the soul, which is the seat of reason and intelligence.

Socrates, therefore, made it his task to persuade his fellow citizens to search for and discover the rational principles for the proper conduct of their individual lives as well as that of the city's affairs.

This search for the rational principles for the proper conduct of individual lives as well as social affairs may well be regarded as Socrates's main legacy to mankind. It inspired his greatest pupil, Plato, who amplified it, and through him a host of subsequent philosophers and social theorists including my humble self. It is arguable that it is the same impulse for building on a rationally defensible foundation rather than on mere biblical or ecclesiastical authority that inspired Descartes to propound and adopt his rationalist epistemology, epitomized by his famous epigram, **cogito ergo sum**, I think, therefore I am. In passing, we may note that for us in the field of education, Descartes methodology doubt is an important watershed, to which we shall return presently. Furthermore, the search for the rational principle for the proper conduct of individual lives and social affairs probably reached its zenith during the Age of Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe. In that age, not only did Voltaire's sceptical and satirical wit prove to be a solvent for tolerance, religious bigotry and all forms of superstition, but the Benthamites' principles of utility also served as a broom for sweeping away unjust laws and obscurantist social practices and customs not only in Great Britain but also throughout Europe. More devastatingly, Rousseau's doctrines (e.g., the social contract and naturalism in education) and his vision of a rationally organized, just and egalitarian society proved to be the dynamite whose explosion resulted in the collapse of the corrupt, feudalism and monarchical ancient regime of France during the French Revolution of 1789.

Now, granted that all the foregoing might rightly be regarded as part of the Western intellectual tradition, under which the Socratic tradition is itself subsumable, of what relevance, it might be asked, is it to Nigeria? Specifically, what is the link between the foregoing and what I have been professing over the years? For part of the answer to these questions let us, first of all, examine the relevance and role of philosophy in the Nigerian socio-economic context in general and the educational sector in particular.

III

PHILOSOPHY AND THE NIGERIAN CULTURAL BACKGROUND.

Six basic social institutions have been identified as indispensable for the survival and well-being of any society. The institutions include the family, the educational system, the economy, the political system, a health and welfare system and a religious or moral system. Cultures and civilization are merely various combinations and permutations of the functional prerequisites mentioned above. This is because culture, in the anthropological sense, embraces not only a people's art, music and literature, but also their science and technology, commerce and political organization, philosophy and religion as well as all the ideas and values which permeate the society and bind its people into a recognizable unit.

It must be pointed out, furthermore, that every major culture (the existence of subcultures within it notwithstanding) is an integrated whole, a form of life (to borrow Wittgenstein's idiom) in which the various institutions have interlocking relationships and are held together by a complex glue of ideas, values and a conceptual system. The level of integration varies, of course, from one culture to another. For instance, although Nigeria is a single political unit, albeit a federation, the presence within her borders of a variety of cultures makes the concept of a Nigerian culture a problematic one, even though the extant indigenous ones are subsumable under the umbrella term, traditional culture. If to the quadratic equation of Nigerian traditional culture we now add the new factor, namely, Western culture, our problem takes on the magnitude of a simultaneous equation (Nduka 1974). Thus if we took the one unifying factor, the Nigerian polity, which was imposed on the indigenous polities and nationalities from the beginning of colonial times, a close analysis would reveal the low level of political integration let alone social integration which we have achieved since before and after independence, hence the frequency of military *coup d'états* in post-independence Nigeria. Obviously, we are long way from solving our national simultaneous equation. Yet our continued existence as a nation and our progress up the ladder of national development demand that a solution must be found to the national simultaneous equation. What roles can philosophy in general and philosophy of education in particular, play in the search for a solution to our national problem?

Just as different areas of human activity corresponding to aspects of the various social institutions identified above come under the purview of different academic disciplines (e.g. the political system under political science, the physical environment system comes directly under the purview of the disciplines of education. These disciplines include the social sciences of psychology, sociology and management studies and the humanistic

studies of history and philosophy. This is part of rationale for the nomenclature, school of Educational studies, the original name of the present Faculty of Education.

Now, whereas the various other disciplines contribute their respective ideas and skills all with a view to solving our national simultaneous equation, philosophy plays a somewhat different role. In consonance with the definition given earlier in this lecture, philosophy takes as its raw materials or basic data the concepts and principles which we use to analyse and organize our experience, especially under the rubric of the six social institutions identified above. Then by using the philosophical techniques of analysis and synthesis we are able not only to clarify the theoretical issues germane to the solution of our national developmental problems but also to develop a comprehensive and coherent view of our society and, perhaps, a new vision of what it could be. The role that philosophy plays with regard to society generally is replicated *mutatis mutandis* by philosophy of education with reference to the educational system.

In performing its role over the ages, philosophy has generally, as Kaufmann points out (Kaufmann 1978), adopted one of two postures: the one heretical, iconoclastic, critical; the other apologetic and conservative. It seems to me that in most developing countries especially the ex-colonial territories, and in Nigeria in particular, whatever philosophizing has been taking place has been long on apologetics and conservatism and short, indeed extremely short, on heresy and criticism. Thus, during the colonial period, the early nationalist, some of them still fondly referred to as the architects of Nigerian political independence, subjected Western imperialism and the whole colonial system to sustained critical analysis and attack. Such critical onslaught constituted a necessary, though not sufficient, cause of the eventual collapse of the colonial system not only in Nigeria but also in other Third World countries.

Unfortunately, no sooner had political independence been won and the erstwhile political critics had stepped into the shoes of the departing colonial master than the fountain of critical examination of the socio-economic and other bases of our nascent Nigerian state seemed to dry up at least in most of the power-wielding circles. In place of the enthronement of the vision of a modern, scientifically oriented, integrated, pragmatic 'philosophies' (Azikiwe 1964, Awolowo 1981) of regionalism, tribalism, life abundant through the acquisition of wealth (by fair or foul means), and to the spectacle of the propping up of quasi-monarchical pretensions of anachronistic institutions to serve modern political ends. Thus we proceeded to build the Nigerian modern state on the quicksand of an amalgam of modern ideas, principles and institutions, on the one hand, and traditional ideas, principles and institutions on the other, worse still, we fell out of the frying-pan of

colonialism into the fire of neo-colonialism. The predictable result has been the twenty-five years of our national independence characterized by wasted opportunities, incompetent political leadership most of the time, monumental fraud and corruption in high places (including census and election rigging) and the enthronement of an unjust socio-economic system.

Indeed, were the real culprits (together with their collaborators) of the massive deceptions, shady business deals kick-backs, fraud and corruption of various types and, of course, the riggings-were all these and other culprits to be identified for what they are and are, the more nakedness of the Nigerian leadership of the last thirty years or so would become embarrassingly obvious. But since, as T.S. Eliot has pointed out, humankind cannot bear much reality; our national *amour-propre* has so far escaped the most fatal blows, thanks to the adroit cover-up operations undertaken both in this country (perhaps inadvertently aided and abetted by Decree No.4 of blessed memory) and by our co-conspirators abroad. Nevertheless, in so many circles both here and abroad, the emperor's clothes of the erstwhile Nigerian leadership are being seen either as threadbare or even non-existent.

To put the record straight, however, we must here repeat what was mentioned earlier in this lecture, namely, that some attempts were made all along the line by some of our intelligentsia either in publications or during seminars to subject the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian socio-economic system to critical philosophical examination. But as was the case during the colonial era, the power that were and are have consistently ignored the more radical critiques of the socio-economic system and suggestions emanating from the socio-economic system and suggestions emanating from the so-called ivory towers and other quarters. This is not because those critiques and suggestions were and are irrelevant or impracticable, as some have disingenuously claimed, but more often rather, because they have been either embarrassingly true or have threatened the fragile stability of the *status quo*.

Instead, those powers have by and large preferred to listen to the apologetics (Ayida 1973) of the accredited spokesmen of the capitalist status quo such as the so-called 'super permanent secretaries' and other advisers and 'analysts' drawn from either the private sector or even some institutions of higher learning. When these spokesmen and advisers were not singing the praises of the so-called revolutionary military regimes in Nigeria, they were busy assuring us that all was well with our tottering economy. One wonders whether, in retrospect, the recipients of the specious pieces of advice and threadbare

assurances of our erstwhile economic wizards might not, in their heart of hearts, echo *mutatis mutandis* the soliloquy of Shakespeare's Macbeth:

And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,

That palters with us in double sense;
That keeps the word of promise to our ear
And break it to our hope!

It is in the light of the foregoing, among other things that I did in other connection to maintain that, ever since independence, the philosophical component has remained the weakest link (Nduka 1982) in the chain of Nigerian national developmental efforts. Thus, virtually all the regimes that have ruled Nigeria since independence either preferred to rule without reference to any clearly articulated and coherent philosophy or, if they did dabble in such matters, adopted philosophies whose eclecticism deprived them of any philosophical bite or whose incoherence rendered them virtually useless. A classic example of this is, of course, the Land Use Decree, which is a piece of socialist legislation serving the interest of a capitalist political system. Indeed, is it not ironical that the retiring Chief Justice of the Federation has recently declared that he himself did not understand the Land Use Decree? Be that as it may, of the short-term and long-term consequences of such pieces of legislation one can always say that 'by their fruits ye shall know them.'

Finally, from the point of view of sustained national development, it is a matter of the uttermost regrets that all our post-independence regimes till date, whether civilian or military, have declined to adopt any clearly articulated ideology. Indeed, the Buhari Idiagbon regime even went as far as to discourage any attempt at serious ideological dialogue (Idiagbon 1985). Meanwhile we have made do with such ideological surrogates as Welfarism, Mixed Economy, Ethnicity, Discipline, WAI, and so on. The consequences of our putative ideological innocence have been, of course, as predictable as they are pathetic. It is indeed, pathetic. If not shameful, that a country such as ours, the 'giant of Africa', blessed with abundant human and material resources, which decade ago was basking in the sunshine of the unmerited good fortune of an oil boom, has virtually been reduced in a few years to a beggar nation, thanks to the institutionalization of the political culture of Kleptocracy in the service of bankrupt ideologies. It is against the foregoing cultural background that we are to examine the role of philosophy of education in the national educational enterprise and my own humble efforts therein.

IV

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

On the eve of the attainment of political independence by Nigeria in October 1960, there was published an epoch-making document entitled, *Investment in Education*, and popularly called Ashby Report. This is the report of the high-powered commission appointed in April 1959 and charged with the responsibility of conducting an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of Post-School Certificate and Higher Education over the next twenty years'. That is, up to 1980. Those who are engaged in the business of education in this country know that the Ashby Report has since its publication been virtually regarded as the Bible of the education industry. Although, strictly, the Commission was mandated to inquire into post-school certificate and higher education, its ex cathedra pronouncements on elementary, secondary and other aspects of Nigerian education have had far-reaching effects on educational development generally- for good or ill.

Among the 'gems' one finds in the Report are the following:

1. We have to think of Nigeria in 1980: a nation of some 50 million people, with industries, oil and a well developed agriculture-taking its place in a technological civilization-
2. Enough children are completing primary education to provide the flow of recruits for post-secondary education in the northern Region the first step must be increase, by 1970 if possible, the numbers completing primary school until they reach about 25 per cent of the age-group.
3. The literary tradition and the university degree have become indelible symbols of prestige in Nigeria; by contrast technology, agriculture and other practical subjects, particularly at the sub-professional level, have not won esteem.
4. Although the quality of higher education at present available in Nigeria is insufficient, the quality is beyond reproach.
5. University development in Nigeria should be so planned as to ensure that by 1970 there will be an enrolment of at least 7,500 students, with a substantial growth beyond that figure in the decade 1970-80.

Coming as it did from a commission composed of a galaxy of academics and administrators of international standing, e.g. Sir Eric Ashby, the late Professor K.O.Dike, Senator Shettima Kashim, and the late Dr. Sanya Onabamiro, among others, the Report mesmerized Nigerians by dangling before them the vision of a land of virtually unlimited opportunities for those who could gravitate into the magic circle of high-level manpower: the open sesame into this magic circle is, of course, the university degree or similar qualifications. In our inimitable manner, all efforts in the education industry

were geared towards the attainment of that ultimate goal by fair or foul means from model UPE and special primary schools, through secondary schools, colleges of arts and science, schools of basic studies, polytechnics, West African School Certificate and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations to catchment area factor, quota system, system, certificate racketeering and examination leakages and thence to universities.

Although, it must be admitted, some of the above-mentioned developments were far from the intentions of the Ashby Commission, yet the practical logic of their recommendations made those developments inevitable, given certain factors in the Nigerian socio-economic equations. Thus, as the table below (table 1) indicates, not only did the post-Ashby period witness the phenomenon of the proliferation of universities (and allied institutions) and the phenomenal increase in enrolment figure, we are also now witnessing the merging or closing of some universities and the dangerous phenomenon of masses of certificate-wielding school leavers and graduates (the would-be candidates for high-level manpower positions) roaming the streets and offices in search of non-existent jobs and positions.

TABLE 1
GROWTH OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

YEAR	NO. OF UNIVERSITIES	ENROLOMENT
1960	2	1,476
1970	7	14, 468
1980	17+6 = 23	80,000*

*including 70,252 in Federal Universities
Source: Annual Report July 1978-December, 1982,
National Universities Commission.

What, it might be asked, was the catch in the Ashby recommendations? Why, in spite of the undoubted opportunities and unprecedented good fortune that came our way during the immediate post- Ashby decades, did the vision of national greatness fail to materialize? Is it, for instance, without significance that the bulk of the high-level manpower who have been running this country during the last twenty-five years were mainly the products of the post-Ashby higher education boom together with their

counterparts trained aboard? Is it not the case that the activities of these actors and actresses, some of whom are now languishing in goal while others have escaped aboard to enjoy their ill-gotten wealth, contributed to the collapse of the Second Republic.

Supposing truly fact-finding inquiries were instituted into census and election riggings, the real causes and motivations of the military coups and counter-coups as well as the secession, into how millions and billions of naira were illegally and fraudulently siphoned off through government ministries, parastatals, commercial banks and the Central Bank of Nigeria into private accounts here and abroad, what would be left of our much-vaunted high-level manpower? Alas, the catch was encapsulated, inadvertently perhaps, in the very Report itself, in the very vision of greatness which that Report explicitly or implicitly advocated. Shall we explain?

By a strange coincidence, a young philosophy graduate, recently returned from abroad and working as an education officer at Port Harcourt around the period of the Ashby Commission's activities, was engaged in a philosophical examination of the Nigerian cultural milieu with particular reference to education. Within six months of the publication of the Commission's findings our young graduate had completed the writing of the little book eventually published under the title, *Western Education and the Nigerian Cultural Background* (Nduka 1964). The final Chapter of that young graduate's book was trenchantly entitled *Beyond Ashby*.

Vice –Chancellor, Sir, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I must confess that then that young philosophy graduate is no other than my humble self. The question now is what has all this to do with the catch in the Ashby Report?

A short while ago, I hinted that the catch in the Ashby Report was internal. Let us return to the 'gems' culled from the Report.

Items 3, 4 and 5 are of crucial importance in this regard. While admitting that the literary tradition and the university degree had become symbols of prestige in Nigeria, whereas technology, agriculture and other practical subjects had not won esteem, the Report went on extol the higher education available in Nigeria and declared that its quality was beyond reproach. The only fault the Commission seemed to find with the higher education available was the insufficient quantity of it. Hence, the Report recommended an annual university enrolment of at least 7,500 students by 1970, with a substantial growth beyond that figure in the 1970-80 decade. By contrast the Report recommended an annual of 2,500 technicians from six technical institutes. We can see at once that, although the Commission's vision of Nigerian 1980 was that of a country taking its place in a

technological civilization, its recommendations had the effect, inadvertently, of exacerbating the very tendencies towards a literary tradition and elitism, which the Report identified (cf. item 3 of the GEMS) as did the Phelps-Stokes Commission (Lewis, 1962) in 1922, among others, rather than advancing the cause of technology.

To my mind the decisive and, fatal catch in the Ashby Report lay in the Commission's vision of Nigeria in 1980 a vision which the then ruling elite accepted either because it suited their purposes or because they failed to comprehend its ramifications or because the prestige of the authors guaranteed its easy passage. Like the child in the well 'known story of the Emperor's New clothes, I did cast, from a philosophical point of view, great doubts on the vaunted excellence of the Report. Specifically, having made a close study of the history of Western education in relation to the Nigerian cultural milieu and discovered several shortcomings in the then existing system of education (Nduka, 1964), I failed to share the Commission's complacency as regards the quality of Nigerian education in general and of higher education in particular.

Furthermore, in my view, any shortcomings in the Commission's vision of Nigeria would fatally compromise the eventual products of the higher education system, the so-called high-level manpower. Of course, in the euphoric atmosphere of the attainment of political independence and with the authority and prestige of the authors of the Ashby Report to lull the ruling elite into complacent self-satisfaction, my comment and warnings were conveniently ignored, if ever they were read. Our Ikwere elders have a saying which admirably sums up such a situation, namely *Oká eni – mgbádná, O bu awha éśáawù hna be jì egé a*, which means, it takes seven years to receive the message of the slug. Shall we explain?

My most radical criticisms of the Ashby Report centred around what I considered to be warped vision of Nigeria in 1980 and of the type of values (or lack of them) which the educational system extolled or envisaged by the Ashby Commission was likely to inculcate. Reading between the lines, one saw that the Commission's vision of Nigeria in 1980 was that it would remain a satellite country with satellite industries, producing oil and agricultural products of the more highly industrialized countries, a voice to be listened to (politely, perhaps) in the Christian, and the Moslem world with the beginnings of its own literature, and taking its 5th or 6th rate place in a technology civilization. The envisaged army of graduated, technicians, and other certificate holders, the so-called high-level manpower, would, in the circumstances, be required for serving the political, military, bureaucratic, professional, commercial and other arms of our comprador state Or did anyone seriously believe that in granting us political independence in 1960 Britain and the

Western world desired us to be economically and culturally independent of them? Did we not, infact, only narrowly escape having the albatross of and Anglo-Nigerian defense pact hung round our neck? Indeed, the present state of our national underdevelopment as well as our technological underdevelopment is the ironical vindication of that vision.

Fellow Nigerians, there is an even more tragic vindication of one aspect of the implicit vision, against which I had warned. Although I am not, and had never aspired to be, a prophet by profession, I did warn that our young nation, which was being built on the foundations of cut-throat materialism, nepotism, political jobbery (e.g., census and election rigging and bribery and corruption (now of monumental proportions), was 'heading for trouble, despite all appearances to the contrary'. I further warned that, if care was not taken, in the operation of a polity built on the foundations identified above

“The army of so-called high-level manpower
May be turned into willing or unwilling
Accomplices in a gigantic fraud.”
(Nduka, 1964).

Of course, as we now know to our cost and sadness, this alternative vision, the reverse side of the Ashby coin, materialized in all its moral nakedness and political brutality during the Second Republic.

Be it noted, however, that over the last twenty-five year it has been my thankless task, in the true Socratic Tradition, not only to subject the value orientations of the Nigerian polity to critical analysis but also to suggest an alternative vision of, and paths to, true national greatness. I shall, therefore, end this lecture by recapitulating the main ingredients of this vision and using education as our launching pad for our journey into the space age.

V

PHILOSOPHY AND A NEW VISION OF NIGERIA

At its best, the philosophical enterprise involves two complementary processes, namely, analysis and synthesis. Whether critical or apologetic, analysis leads sooner or later to a synthesis, whereby the analytically derived arguments and elements and knowledge derived from different fields of experience are welded into either a comprehensive theory or a world-view (*weltanschauung*), or, in appropriate circumstances, a new vision of society. Thus, a scientifically-oriented cosmology, in contradistinction from a religious one, say, is likely to embrace elements drawn from evolutionary biology, history anthropology, astronomy and physics, among others. Similarly, a philosophical, that is to say comprehensive, view of human conduct in a scientifically –oriented system of thought will

embrace sights derived from biology, chemistry, psychology (including psychoanalysis) and, of course, moral philosophy and metaphysics. Thus, as Socrates as well as his pupil Plato demonstrated, by starting with the analysis of such concepts as justice, goodness, *arête* or excellence, courage and knowledge, all of which bristle with philosophical and educational problems, we may by the process of synthesis arrive etc. as defined, may be exemplified.

When, in the early sixties, therefore, I turned the analytical searchlight on the Nigerian cultural milieu with particular reference to education, certain features emerged. First, Nigeria was (and largely is) underdeveloped – economically, industrially, agriculturally and educationally. Secondly, following from above, there was mass illiteracy together with pervasive ignorance and superstition in a society that was largely non-scientific and non-technological in orientation. Thirdly, the health services were poor and the sanitary conditions deplorable. In spite of over sixty years of British colonial tutelage, Nigeria was largely a tribal society, whose political integration was minimal. Apart from the fact that the prevalent ethnic and religious rivalries were fueling political disunity, even the political elite were vacillating between wholesale revival of the ancient powers of the emirs, chiefs and Obas, on the one hand, and the wholehearted pursuit of a democratic and truly republican polity, on the other.

Furthermore, the value orientations of the society were becoming increasingly indefinite and suspect. For instance, traditional customs and practices based on a communal ethos jostled with others based on Western individualism and capitalism. Worst of all, our fledgling capitalists, lacking the redeeming virtues of the original European capitalists, virtues embraced *à la Max Weber* under the umbrella term the *protestant ethic*, and embracing instead Western materialism in the gloss form a conspicuous consumption, set out on a flight aided by the winds of international high finance, domestic bribery and corruption and all the attendant vices which reached their nadir in the Second Republic.

As indicated earlier in this lecture, the analytical exercise begun over twenty years ago was not an end in itself but a means of bringing about a better understanding of our society with a view to transforming it on the basis of a clearly articulated vision of society. The exercise was a continuous process involving monitoring the health of the society over the decades and recommending appropriate strategies for bringing about the society of our dream, using education as the most powerful means of achieving our goal. Analysis, therefore, went hand in hand with synthesis.

Thus, no sooner had I been appointed the Dean of Education of the university than I persuaded my colleagues in the Faculty to join me in the task of subjecting the Nigerian social system to critical analysis, using education as our touchstone. We simultaneously tackled the problem from two angles: one predominantly academic and theoretical in orientation, the other practical and geared towards the Nigerian society as a whole. First, we undertook to launch a journal entitled *Journal of Education in Developing Areas*, whose maiden issue appeared in May 1982. This journal has since been devoting its pages not only to the systematic analysis of contemporary educational theories and issues and to the exploration of the historical, philosophical, sociological, psychological and economic dimensions of education in developing areas but also to the dissemination of research findings, all with a view to improving educational practice and society at large.

The second attack on the national problem was directed at the moral front. Acutely aware of the fact that the problems of the Nigerian society had assumed the dimensions of a moral crisis by the early 1980's, problems which the former Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo had touched upon in his famous Jaji Speech of September 1977, my colleagues and I decided to organize a national conference on moral education (Nduka, 1979). As envisaged, the objectives of the conference would be, first, to generate and sustain informed dialogue among various classes and groups of Nigerians with a view to identifying the viable norms, especially the moral values and attitudes, which are capable of sustaining a modern, plural society such as Nigeria. Secondly, it was also hoped that the conference would make concrete proposals as to how the values and attributes so identified might best be disseminated and inculcated not only among the nation's youth but also in the society at large. The long and short of the matter is that we hosted the National Conference on Moral Education held at Hotel Presidential, Port Harcourt from 1st to 5th February, 1982.

As many of you know, the proceedings of the said National Conference were published in book form under the title *New Perspectives in Moral Education* (Nduka, Iheoma, 1983) and launched in this very hall on 9th December, 1983-just three weeks to the collapse of the Second Republic. What happened to those proceedings aptly illustrates the fortunes, or rather misfortunes of many ideas and suggestions emanating from different individuals and from a variety of quarters – ideas which, had they been grasped and acted upon in good time by leaders of vision, might have transformed this country a long time ago and propelled her higher up the ladder of national development. As we shall see presently, the most important outcome of the Conference was the Communiqué, which embodied a number of ideas and suggestions of fairly radical import. Although the Communiqué was

issued on 5th February 1982 and subsequently communicated not only to the press but also to the forty ministries of information and Education throughout the country, its message virtually remained a dead letter for over two years until, by a strange and fortunate coincidence, the omnipotent and omniscient Buhari-Idiagbon regime launched its WAI Campaign in 1984. Shall we explain?

The table below (figure1), reproduced from the said Communiqué (see pages 8-11 of *New Perspectives*). Contains a list of key values which the Conference Unanimously recommended and strongly urged all educational institutions and the Nigerian society at large to cultivate and practice.

Figure 1
Recommended Key Values

Key Values (1982 Communiqué)	Manifestations
1. HONESTY	Rejection of fraud, Cheating, bribery and corruption
2. REGARD AND CONCERN FOR FOR OTHERS	Tolerance, Humaneness, Courtesy
3. JUSTICE	Fairness in one's personal dealings with others
4. DISCIPLINE Legitimate	Self-Control, Moderation, Respect for Authority
5. RIGHT ATTITUDE TO WORK	punctuality and Regularity Devotion to duty Service Dignity of labour
6. COURAGE	physical courage, moral courage, spiritual courage
7. NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS	patriotism, Service to Nation, Loyalty, Unity.

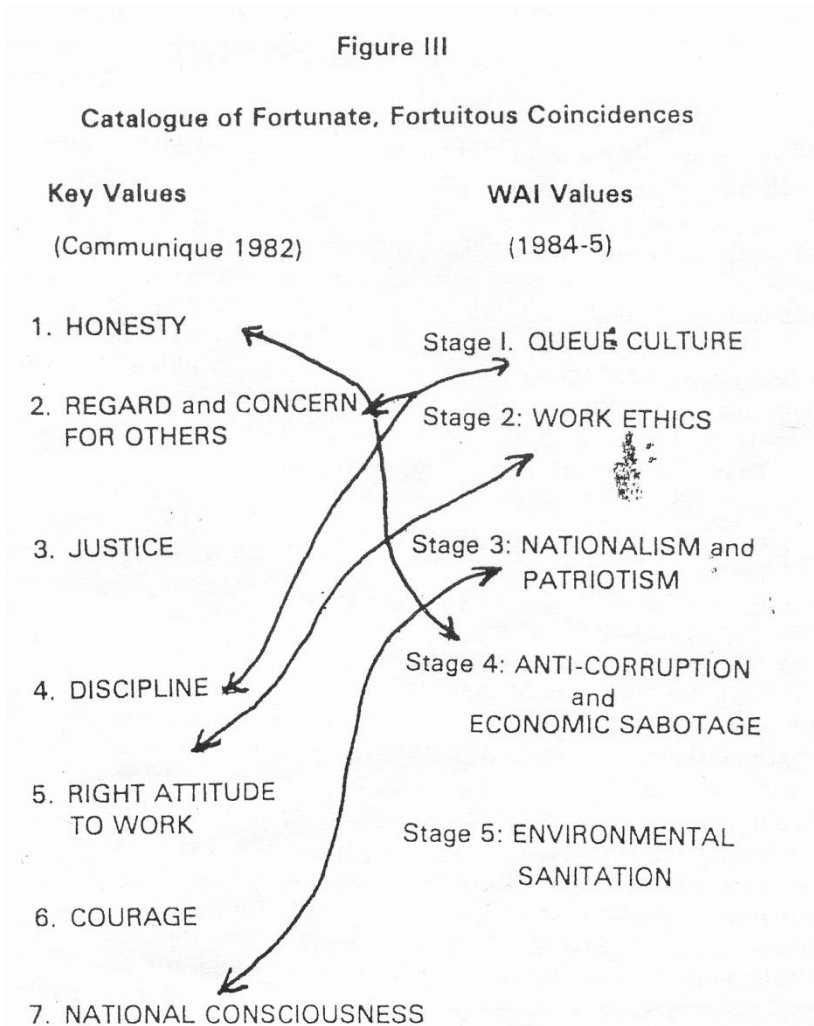
Despite one's reservations concerning the manner in which it was waged, it seems to me that the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) was the most positive and most progressive step taken by the ousted Buhari-Idiagbon regime. The table below (Figure II) shows the various values they tried to inculcate among the generality of Nigerians.

Figure II

Stage of WAI

Stage 1	Queue Culture March 1984
Stage 2	Work Ethics May 1984
Stage 3	Nationalism and Patriotism August 1984
Stage 4	Anti-Corruption and Economic Sabotage June 1985
Stage 5	Environmental Sanitation July 1985

Although they tended to give the impression of condescending omniscience, (figure III) below belies this assumptions.



Should anyone be tempted to bolster their claim by referring to the putative originality of Stage 5 of WAI, I may take the liberty here and now to inform them that the Buhari-Idiagbon regime and their advisers were merely catching up on ideas I had explicitly advocated at pages 136-8 of my Western-Education and the Nigeria Cultural Background twenty years before.

That, Vice-Chancellor, has been the nature of my profession over the years.

VI

THE SOCRATIC POSTSCRIPT

As is usually my custom, I cannot resist the temptation of ending an important public statement of mine with postscript, which is usually the tail in which I place my sting. My sting consists in the alternative vision of Nigeria which I have and aspects of which I have been outlining and advocating in various publications spread over two to three decades. Briefly stated, vision is that of the passing away of what in social anthropological parlance is referred to as traditional society. J.A. Symonde puts it thus in poetic terms.

These things shall be: a loftier race
Than e'er the world hath known shall rise,
With flame of freedom in their souls
And light of knowledge in their eyes

I foresee traditional society in Nigeria, indeed in all Africa, whether in the North or South, east or west, as destined to give way to a new order of society. Let us know a little more light on this and dispel certain misconceptions and illusions. First, we must realize that, in all essentials, Africans in general and Nigerians in particular share certain human characteristics and needs with other peoples and races of the world. Among these are the quest for freedom, justices and equality and the desire for knowledge, all of which go beyond the biological needs of food and security of life. Yet in recent historical times, Africans have been subjected to feudalistic and autocratic rule which denied basic freedom to the great mass of citizens of such regimes. In the not so distant past, this state of affairs was the ruler rather than the exception under the rule of emirs, chief, Obas and other traditional potentates. Slavery was part of this order of society, which was worsened by the European-dominated slave trade. Soon we passed from traditional authoritarianism and despotism to European colonial domination. Fortunately for Nigerians, we regained political independence (though not economic independence) in October 1960. What was achieved by more violent means in Rome (529 B.C), in U.S.A. (1776), in France (1789), U.S.S.R. (1917), in china (1949), and in Egypt (1952), among others. I see recent attempt either to institute military dictatorship or restore the long last monarchical powers of traditional rulers as not only misguided attempts to turn the hands of the clock back and a betrayal of our hard-worn political freedom but, ultimately, doomed to failure.

Secondly, having through my researches come to the conclusion that a fundamental cause of our backwardness vis-à-vis other more advanced nations of the world is the dead weight of ignorance and superstition pressing down on the mass of the people, I have since developed a vision of Nigeria. Whose citizens will be enlightened and will have the liberating light of scientific knowledge in their eyes. This vision will not materialize if, for whatever reason, the youth are denied even elementary education to which in certain parts of the country only about 25 percent of the relevant age group have access, not to mention an even lower percentage among the girls (Adamu, 1973). Neither will it materialize when disproportionately large amounts of time and human and material resources are expended on religious preoccupations and literary studies, often to the detriment and neglect of practical, scientific and technological studies and pursuits. Indeed, the comparative neglect of the latter types of studies and pursuits by the purveyors of colonial education who, instead, laid greater emphasis on religious and literary studies in order to supply religious and administrative personnel, is largely responsible for our present state of underdevelopment.

To rescue our society from the consequences of this century old neglect and lift the dead weight of ignorance and superstition referred to above, education must be used to mobilize the whole country and release her creative and productive forces. All aspects of education, formal and non-formal, and all segments of society, rich and poor, old and young, must be pressed into service during such an emergency. As I see it, the much discussed 6-3-3-4 system of education as conceived and implemented at present amounts to merely tinkering with the problem. Something similar to the course of action I have in mind for the problem. Something similar to the course of action I have in mind was adopted by the USSR soon after the 1917 Revolution and within twenty years she had been transformed from a backward European country to a highly industrialized and powerful one, which successfully withstood the onslaught of the Nazi war machine during the Second World War.