Justifying the Ground for Philosophical Involvement in the Search for Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract

The UN's call for environmental sustainability emphasizes the precarious condition of the earth's environment in our time. This paper considers this as a litmus test for checking the applicability of philosophy in concrete situations and practical areas of human need, in reaction to those who regard it as obsolete. This paper therefore sets to address these twin questions: what is the actual state of the earth's environments, and can philosophy be relevant to human situations? The paper pursues its twin aim of deepening our ecological knowledge and ascertaining the relevance of philosophy. The UN set Millennial goal on environmental sustainability (MDG-7) is used for illustration. It is analytical in nature. Its finding(s) will be useful to all readers, students, environmentalists and policy makers alike.

Introduction

A philosophy student shared a story of an encounter that shook him to the marrow. His narration was on a discussion he had with another undergraduate student from another department over the public perception of philosophy. Being a philosophy major himself, he felt the need to sound his friend's opinion about philosophy. So, one evening, as they were taking a walk along the galleys of their university's academic block, he prodded his friend by asking him to switch over and pursue a career in philosophy. The friend retorted brashly: "What? Am I crazy? What am I going to do with that … argue every time?" This was the rudest shock of his life. Though he had taken it stoically, but it made him to wonder over what has become of philosophy in our time and why his friend spoke with so much bitterness against it. He started getting worried over his own choice as a philosophy major himself. Has made a wrong choice? Is philosophy obsolete? Is he in his right senses? Or, is he standing on a safe terrain?

This wonder is not much different from Suen's consternation over an author's remark that the present generation is "living in a post philosophical age – an era when philosophy is no longer viable" (Suen, 2021). The above reaction has become a constant among philosophy students and scholars who have had it always rubbed on their faces when their peers tell them that they are pursuing a career in a field that is characterized in vociferosity, with no real relevance to human life.

Two narratives in Adeshina Afolayan's 2016 draft paper at the University of Texas at Austin illustrate this consternation and how right Suen could be. The first goes this way:

> Sometime in 2009, a member of the House of Assembly sponsored a legislative bill that was to lead to the establishment of a National Institute of Philosophy in Nigeria … This is the response of a Northern Senator to the proposed bill: 'If I want advice on financial matters, I would go to the economic institute and get it. Again if I need advice on housing matters, I

> would go to relevant commission or institute for it. But what would a philosophic institute or commission do for me. Will they advise me on how to argue with my wife on how much it should cost to cook a pot of soup?'" (Afolayan, 2016).

In effect, this Federal Lawmaker has made two relevant statements about philosophy: first, it is irrelevant to practical needs; second, it is an engagement in frivolous argumentation. This is affirmed by the outburst of laughter on the floor of Nigeria's upper chambers.

He culled his second narrative from a social media forum – nairalland.com. It shows netizen's reaction when the idea came up again on a social media forum. In reaction to former President Goodluck Jonathan's request for an urgent need to establish a Nigerian National Philosophy Commission (NNPC), one of the comments laughed in derision: "Nigerian National Philosophy Commission?? ROFLMAO;" another added: "Another chop chop..." while another queries: "Is there anything as Nigerian philosophy … What philosophy is president Goodluck subscribing to? Shouldn't we demand that our leaders take elementary courses in philosophy?" This would turn into a channel for embezzling public fund.

It is evident deducible from Afolayan's anecdotes that this poor perception of philosophy cuts across the different strata of the Nigerian society. Afolayan himself asserts that the perception "…is critically at its lowest ebb" in Nigeria and in other climes (Afolayan, 2016). There is no doubt that this impacts negatively on career choice and development in the society. In summary, this boils down to saying that philosophy is an obsolete, a loquaciously argumentative, time wasting, activity, with no real or measurable contribution to human need. In Afolayan's words, this makes the philosophical enterprise a mere "house of words and arguments".

The above images leave the philosophy apologist saddled with the struggle to defend this discipline from what he calls the "rhetoric of relevance". Afolayan himself lent his energy to this task with the purpose of establishing how to move philosophy from misconception to relevance. However, his choice of the introspective approach into the way philosophy is done in Arica led him to the conclusion that philosophy has been an essentially academic activity that is quite estranged from human life (Afolayan, 2016). To buttress this point, he avowed that the activity of African philosophers has been centred on ascertaining whether there exists anything like African philosophy, instead of delving into such relevant themes like healthcare, transportation, corruption, taxation, (un)employment, food, etc (Afolayan, 2016). This leaning towards the sociocentrism discloses a hyped notion of "relevance" that is derivable only from an exclusively quantitative calculus. This underplays the rational and qualitative approach that characterizes philosophy as a reflective activity and rational inquiry, hence the poor perception of philosophy.

The above interpretation of philosophy has left for philosophers the two-fold tasks of deconstruction of this poor perception of philosophy and proof of its applicative value. These the paper has undertaken to do by making some clarifications on the nature, task and method of philosophy and by underscoring how this applies in praxis, using MDG-7 as illustration. The underlying question this paper is addressing is: How can philosophy help humankind to respond to challenging situations like crisis and to attain environmental sustainability from the present state of deleterious condition to which the earth's environments have been subjected?

Philosophy: Nature and Task

The first thing any new inquirer has to know about philosophy is its wide scope. It is a broad-based discipline with no peculiar subject of inquiry; everything is relevant to its concern (Suen, 2021). As free as the human mind is, so is its thought free to navigate the plethora of themes, impressions or ideas that come to it. Philosophical thought covers issues that are pertinent to us, our life, our actions and words, others, the world around us and our relationship with the world. As a rational inquiry, its scope covers even those practical concerns, language and challenging situations in which the human being and the world around him/her find themselves.

Without prejudice to others, the etymological definition, *"philos-sophos*", a coinage from two Greek words, "*philos"* (love) and *"sophos"* (wisdom), (Lat. *philos-sophia*), "love of wisdom", underscores philosophy's special character as an intellectual activity which aims at acquiring knowledge for a well-ordered living. "Wisdom" itself means the "perfect knowledge of all that man can know, as well for the conduct of his life as for the preservation of his health and the discovery of all the arts" (Descartes, 2022). Chinweuba calls it "rational behaviour", and by that, he means the ability or result of the ability to think and act utilizing knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, insight, or that "… capacity of determining what is good or bad and the ability to make good choices or wise decisions" (Chinwuba, 2019).

Humans, by their nature are "rational inquirers"; beings who are desirous of knowledge (Aristotle, Metaphysics, Bk 1, 1, in trans. by W. D. Ross), "have questions, demand answers, and want these answers to be as cogent as the circumstances allow" (Rescher, 2021; see also, Suen, 2021). Their "questions" entail a comprehensive, critical, and rational examination of a given problem, in the hope of arriving at an ultimate explanation, answer or solution. Arriving at "the ultimate" requires the carefulness that can only be guaranteed by the process of critical thinking or logical reasoning and thorough examination. In contrast to the skepticism of Gorgias of Leontini, René Descartes' employs this in his methodic doubt. His wished to discover a solid foundation upon which he could build his knowledge, a foundation that would remain indubitable even under the pressures of dream or of a deceiving evil demon, or some axiomatic base upon which absolutely certain knowledge can be deduced. And to illustrate this further, he rejected sensation as a source of reliable knowledge. Aristotle and the Scholastics subscribed to the authority of sensation as axiom for all knowledge since, according to the Scholastic reformulation of Aristotle's view, *Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu, that is,* "Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses", "all knowledge must come from sensation" (Thomas Aquinas, *Questioness disputatae de veritate,* q. 2a. 3arg. 19). But Descartes would not accept the testimony of the senses for the basis of knowledge, since "it is not prudent to trust someone (or something) that has deceived us even once ...". His critical approach demanded the subjection of "all of his previous beliefs ... to clear the mind of preconceived opinions that might obscure the truth" (Skirry, 2023) to doubt and critical examination. The task before us, he claims, is to critically examine all our previous assumptions and claims, until we should find a basic axiomatic truth upon which all our knowledge would rest as on a foundation. He himself found this foundation of truth only in an intuitively grasped metaphysical axiom, the existence of a thinking self, the cogito. From this, he established as the basic foundation of all knowledge.

In its nature, wisdom is an engaged rational behaviour on an intelligent pursuit of appropriate ends, or the appropriate use of reason to resolve choices in the best possible way, and in the use of one's intelligence to figure out the best practices in any given circumstance. This makes balanced living, even within one's environment,

the end point of every philosophizing exercise. Philosophers of science apply the same critical examination in assessing the activities of scientists in scientific research and their implications for the wider society. For example, they query the rationale behind the production and the content of IRV vaccines and the implication of their administration on non-infected covid patients.

There abound detailed information on the condition of the earth's environments, thanks to innumerable "eco-literatures" (Meinberg, 1995). The UN's 6th Global Environmental Outlook Report (2019), identifies some observable causal factors of present environmental crises, which the report calls human footprints. But the rational inquirer goes beyond all these to underline those remotest of explanations that spurred those human footprints that eventually lead to the degradation of the environments, as one would of first principles (cf., Phaedo, 96 a 6-10; Falcon, 2023). Aristotle identified the first principles as goal of philosophical research. His Posterior Analytics teaches that no one can boast of attaining adequate knowledge of a problem who has no access to the root causes of the problem: "we think we have knowledge of a thing only when we have grasped its cause" (APost. I 2, 71 b 9–11. Cf. APost. II 11, 94 a 20; Phys. II 3, 194 b 17–20). The same teaching is elaborated in the following text of his Physics:

> ... we do not think that we know a thing until we are acquainted with its primary conditions or principles, and have carried out analysis as far as its simplest elements. Plainly therefore, the science of Nature, as in other branches of study, our first task will be to try to determine what relates to its first principles" (Phys. Bk 1 ch. I,184a10-15).

These primary conditions are none other than the "archai", that is, the "root causes" or "first principles" of things. By that, he means "That from which a thing can first be known" (Aristotle, Metaphysics, Bk V ch. II, 1013a, 13-15). For example, an apple is an apple because of the arrangement of its constitutive atomic structure. If these were structured differently, it would cease to be an apple. The determination of the gender of a child is possible only if we can identify the constitutive chromosomes, just as 2 molecules of hydrogen (H_2) bond with 1 molecule of oxygen to produce water (H_2O). Bertram Russell shares a similar view when he located the meaningfulness of propositions in their constitutive atomic elements. Thus, in the constituent part(s) of a complex or simple entity lies the reason for or principle its being. We cannot claim to know what apple, male gender, or water, apple is without any knowing its constitutive structure.

These chromosomes, "atoms" and molecules are the "first principles" or first causes on which other explanations about maleness, apple or water are built. It is by "acquaintance with these (principles [archai], conditions, or elements) that knowledge, that is to say scientific knowledge, is attained" (Aristotle, De Phys, Bk 1 ch 1, 184a10). Any other knowable thing about these entities must be so dependent on them as though the principles themselves may indeed be known apart from what depends on them, the latter cannot nevertheless be known apart from former (Descartes, 2022).

This explains the basic task of the philosopher: to discover these principles or root causes through established habits of rational inquiry. In this context, the philosopher responds too to the UN's MDG-7 goal by employing his instrument (rational inquiry) to shed light on the factor(s) that is/are responsible for this malaise that is dragging the earth and its environments to a precarious condition.

The Condition of our Physical Environments Today

The physical environment itself is the house (oikos) or those natural surroundings within which plants, animals and humans live and thrive (Ordinioha, 2011). This includes "all those factors external to the organism that affect its survival, growth, development, and reproduction" (Ojemen, 2011). Amaechi underscores the importance of the environment right by calling to mind the depth of debt which all biotic entities owe their respective environments and ecosystems. He concludes by stating how "…man's environment – climate, topography et cetera – wields a very heavy influence on his socio-economic activities" (Amaechi, 2011).

Inversely, an embattled environment and its deleterious condition impact all life forms within it and the future of the earth as a whole. This precarious condition places its entire ecosystems and their biodiversities on the red line alert of extinction. Scientific fact checks reveal that the earth's environments have been so degraded that all biotic factors, including human life and the future of the earth itself are placed under threat of extinction. Parker (2019) adds that the distortion or outright destruction of biodiversities and ecosystems lead to the consequent decline of populations of many species, migration, and increase of their extinction rates. For illustration, she writes:

> Presently, 42 percent of land-based invertebrates, 34 percent of freshwater invertebrates, and 25 percent of marine invertebrates are at risk for extinction … As for the Earth itself, 10 out of 14 land habitats have seen a decrease in vegetation productivity. Forty percent of wetlands have been lost to agriculture and urban development since 1970 ... Deforestation has slowed, but continues. Genetic diversity is in decline, threatening food security (Parker, 2019).

She ends up predicting an imminent major extinction as a result of this destruction.

The above situation is tied to such footprints as "what humans consume, how they create energy, dispose of waste...", etc. Above that, as Gupta and Ekins observe, the lack of political will, with the speed and scale to act among administrators at their different levels inhibit the reduction or total stoppage of the human causal factors of environmental crises (Gupta and Ekins, in Parker, 2019). Willis (2013), for instance, indicts the multinational corporations (owned by the Global Rich) of championing abusive use of the environments in poorer nations. So is it also with lumbering in Central African and Amazon regions. Such human *faux pas* mete out destructive impacts on the same environment that hosts and shields humankind. Humans still posit actions, especially in the aggressive pursuits of their economic and developmental interests, that have environmentally endangering consequences in spite the global outcry and scientific insights on the consequences of a depleted environments. One can therefore say without equivocation, that the planet is standing at a crossroads as a result of environmental crisis.

Nigeria is an example of a country with "beautiful nature, small and large rivers and picturesque forests inhabited by animals and birds" (Golub, 2018) where the landscape and its vast natural and human resources and biodiversity have been dragged to this deleterious condition. Isife (2012) and Mukhtar (2021) underpin the causes while Nwachukwu (2021) points to deforestation and emission of GhGs among the major factors of environmental crisis in the country; Mukhtar underlines human demographic factor, as Isife writes about their consequences in such an avalanche of environmental conditions as degradation, pollution, flooding and erosion (see Isife, 2012). Quite recently, flooding reached a humanitarian proportion in Nigeria, particularly in 2022, affecting 34 out of the 36 states of the federation. It left more than 2.8 million people impacted, hundreds of lives lost, about 1.3 million

displaced, amidst damaged infrastructure and farmlands (United Nations, 2022). Other pointers to the negative impacts of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation abound. Disease outbreaks, mass extinction of certain life forms, migration of some animal, bird and insect species, poverty, displacement of large proportions of the human population and conflict are the indicators.

The first global outlook report in 1997, for instance, created much awareness of the reasons behind this condition of our earth's environments and underlined the various "urgent actions" needed to arrest or reverse this situation (see, Parker, 2019). Against this backdrop, the UN leadership has undertaken to call the first shot with 8 set Millenium goals to be achieved by all nations by the year 2015. The seventh is environmental sustainability.

MDG-7: Environmental Sustainability

Environment sustainability, explains Leke and Leke (2019), refers to the conservation, management and rational utilization of natural resources in such a way as to maintain the integrity of each ecosystem, support all life, ensure the preservation of biodiversity and prevent environmental degradation. This forms one of the pillars of sustainability development, the others being social and economic sustainability. It is an aspect of the development process which emphasizes the harnessing of natural and social resources with major considerations for continuity and the future (Leke & Leke, 2019). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), on the other hand, has it as "the international community's most broadly shared, comprehensive and focused framework for reducing poverty". She interprets the MDGs as eight basic frameworks or a "set quantitative objectives" to "drive international development policy" for a rather all-embracive global development agenda at the start of the 21st century (Migiro, 2007). The declaration which was first signed after the UN's Millenium Summit in 2000 was set to be achieved in 2015 (WHO, Millennium Development Goals).

By the declaration, those world leaders affirmed the interface between poverty, sickness, inequality, injustice, conflict, and environmental crisis (UNDESA no date) and the connection between the set goals, development and peace. Ignorance of these connections entrenches the underlined environmental shortfalls, poverty and underdevelopment. The goals are therefore steps towards salvaging the earth from its present deleterious states and guarding it against future relapse into those same pitfalls. These MDGs are therefore envisaged durable action plans to curb global underdevelopment and to reposition development on level-playing pathways to incorporate the global poor.

"Sustainable development" is the mark word for this project. This is "a holistic approach that considers environmental, social, and economic dimensions, acknowledging that all must be considered together to find lasting prosperity" if many in the world are to be lifted out of poverty margin. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General to the UN, named "economic growth, social progress and protection of the environment together with the natural resources", as the "three pillars" of sustainable development (Odey, 2011). The seventh goal (MDG-7), the appeal to "ensure environmental sustainability", stands on the third leg of the tripod. This adds emphasis on Amaechi's assertion on the role of the environment in human development. MDG-7 lays stress on the relation of ecological balance, human health and overall development.

Two of its four targets demand

- the reversing the loss of environmental resources

- a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by the year, 2010

This goal environment shields all life in their diversity, and provides for their sustenance. This makes its sustainability logically prior to all other MDGs. While maternal health, child mortality, or HIV, affect particular victims as individuals, environmental crisis, on the other hand, affects whole populations, human or otherwise, in a single swoop. Scientists describe this crisis as "a global phenomenon, which is not limited to any particular region or place and with multiple dimensions to its powers of destruction" (Talukder, 2018).

However, the present global index of the earth's environments shows that MDG-7 goal is far from being met, nearly a decade beyond the set timeline. Neither the efforts of world leaders and the NGOs, nor even the fruits of researches in scientific ecology have been able to arrest or stop present environmental blights. Instead, there is rather, as Parker notes, an increased global concern over an imminent environmental catastrophe. The above consciousness engenders two main different but interrelated thoughts: the first being the inadequacy of scientific ecology alone in resolving the problem of environmental crisis, secondly, the urgency of collaborative action in this global fight against environmental crisis. The later necessitated such strategies as the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Paris Accord of 2015. It led also to this call by UN's Food and Agriculture Organization:

> Strategies, polices and institutions for conserving, protecting, and enhancing natural resources should be strengthened to provide an enabling environment and should be based on the specific resource constraints faced in any given location" (UN, FAO).

The former precipitated Talukder's disappointment and subsequent call for better, more comprehensive or collaborative ecology, where philosophy would participate in the environmental discourse.

Scientific Ecology: the Bane of Environmental Crisis

Historically, this began with the ancient Greeks, in their quest for the "basic substratum" of all there is. Though Aristotle critiqued this teaching for its materialistic undertone. While replacing it with the "first cause" which he explained to mean the principle of change or motion (rather than a material substratum), he affirms the existence of a plethora of such causes (Metaphysics, 1 ch 3. 20-25). But as the fruits of research reveal, the foundation for attitudes that pathologize our relations with our world is the Western mindset of reductive materialism that started remotely in classical Greek philosophers' distinction of entities in the world. It began when Plato and Aristotle classified beings into animate and inanimate. The later's taxonomy of soul into tripartite degrees corresponding to three kinds of living things – vegetative or nutritive (plants), sensitive (animals), and rational (humankind) souls (cf., Aristotle, De Anima, 11-I; Marc, 2016; Vieira, 2021), furthers the rupture with an anthropocentric vision of reality that has plagued Western environmentalism (Matthews, 2014). Materialism has remained "a persistent tendency of the Western tradition" (Matthews, 2014).

This history advanced further with the atomization of matter in Isaac Newton's physics. In Newtonian atomism, matter is the fundamental datum of reality (and experience). In this outlook, physical reality is a composite of distinguishable constituents or units and particles which, in conjunction with the element of mechanism, those particles are said to be "…inert, imbued with no intrinsic principle of motion, and moving only under the influence of external, deterministic forces" (Matthews, 2014). Thus is reborn, the mind-matter dualism in which matter itself, is

characterized without reference to mind. This exclusion of mind from the natural world denies it of the fundamental functions of mind – meaning, purpose and value. This leads to a vision of the universe as inanimate, insentient, "dead" (Matthews, 2014). This reductive materialism marks the next phase of the problem in Western thought.

The separation between humankind and other entities in nature is widened by this materialist outlook. Nature, and its environments, is devoid of any of the various modes or functions of mentality, such as meaning, purpose, agency, intentionality, will, freedom or value (as "worthness" must be ascribed extrinsically). Hence, Matthews argues, "In other words, although loci of life and sentience might exist in such a world, the world in itself is not a living thing. It is a 'dead' world ... It passively, inertly, lays itself out for rational dissection. There is nothing beneath the appearances…" (Matthews, 2014; see also Vieira, 2021). From the above mindset therefore, humans perceive themselves as special beings, masters, rather than members of the natural world. In consequence, there developed an instrumentalist attitude to the natural world and its environments. This has over time manifested in the relentless exploitation of the environments, especially since the industrial revolution from when everything in nature is measured by its usability and economic valuation humans, especially, and the guiding framework for Western economy, technology, and environmentalism. Contemporary environmental philosophers, like Leopold, Richard and Val Routley (later Sylvain Richard and Val Plumwood), Naess, and his Deep ecology school, etc., attribute the root cause of contemporary environmental crisis to this mindset. Along with these mindsets, comes a third, from religious dialectics (cf., Talukder, 2018), popularized by Lynn White's 1967 seminal paper, The Historical Origins of our Environmental Crisis. White accuses Christians of wrongfully interpreting the biblical mandate to "dominate" to mean to conquer and to subdue. As he put it, humans take it to mean a right to treat the environment as they deem fit.

From this derives two environmentally relevant opinions: human distinction and overlordship over nature, and anthropocentrism. Wanting's narration exposes these two as the operating theses for scientific ecology and many environmentalist theories (cf., Wanting, 2018). In anthropocentrism, the natural world is seen from the prism of humankind. This same basis is made the ordained yardstick for the valuation of all non-human entities in nature. None has its own merit or worth. This prism sees these entities as subservient to mankind, since they are merely usable tools (or instruments) for the pursuit of human goods or pleasure. Martin Buber's "I-It" relationship model, a relationship that is mercantile and hideous, and steeped in non-mutuality and non-reciprocity, best captures this anthropocentric outlook on nature. As some authors argue,

> This attitude toward nature has made human beings more cruel. Their greedy attitudes have led them to commit violent actions towards the natural elements and, as a result, the natural balance is hampered. For this reason, the life of all living creatures, including human beings, is now under threat (Matthews, 2018).

This is partly the bane of present environmental crisis and the concern of MDG-7. To guarantee environmental sustainability, therefore, we must recast our minds back to these facts of history, and begin by reorientating the human person towards his proper place in nature as a member, and revalidating a proper interrelationship of mutuality between nature and the various beings in it, as in its ecosystems.

Philosophy and MDG-7

This urgency of such collaborative action necessitates an exploration in philosophy too. Science has played its card by providing ample explanations into the matter based on the assemblage of empirical data at its disposal. It has described environmental crisis as "a product of living in an unsustainable environment". Some of its researches, like the UNEP's 2019 Global Environmental Report, underline its causal factors and its possible destructive outcomes or dangers (cf., Parker, 2019; Talukder, 2018). Some still suggest "appropriate policies" to overcome this crisis (Talukder, 2018). Altogether, these pieces of information have led to the emergence of a number of policies, laws, action plans and regulatory bodies, at least to keep the effects of our activities within planetary boundaries. The political discourse, for instance, now incorporates such matters, like climate change, global warming and pollution, especially within the Global Rich Bloc where green policies have become the mainstream in political discourse. Even political wings with manifestos that promote environmental sensitivity, friendliness and conservation have been created. All this is thanks to insight from science.

However, science has a peculiar proclivity for exclusivism. Its philosophical framework, empiricism, is best known for being dismissive of any claims that are not founded on sensory experience. This is described by that Thomistic dictum, *"nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu*", that is, "Nothing is in the intellect which was not first in the senses" (Thomas, *De Veritate*, Q2. A3, a19). The ancient skeptic, Sextus Empiricus, first used the term, "empirical", in reference to ancient Greek practitioners of medicine who rejected adherence to the dogmatic doctrines of the day, preferring instead to rely on the observation of *phenomena* as perceived in experience. Thus, nothing is knowable without reference to experience. This dismissiveness is manifest in Afolayan's narratives, where philosophical reflection or analysis is dismissed as a time-wasting activity, and the philosopher a mere rabble rouser.

This dismissive approach has not yielded much towards resolving the problem beyond awareness creation. This led to Arne Naess' disappointment: "After the emergence of ecology as a distinct science, it was believed that this science was sufficient to solve the ecological crisis ..." (Naess, 2014, in Talukder, 2018). The reason, he remarks, is that such ecologies have been preoccupied themselves with the symptoms of this malaise rather than the problem itself. For that reason, Naess calls for a "broader approach", a criterion philosophy meets by its nature and approach (Talukder, 2018). Like Naess, Mathews demands a comprehensive involvement of all research field areas in the environmental discourse.

Philosophy "does not have its own problems" as the exact sciences do. But contrary to all dismissive judgments, the philosopher has "a very real and material stake in securing viable answers to our questions as to how things stand in the world we live in" (Suen, 2021). Various historical trajectories themselves disclose how reflective, rational and critical thinking approach has guaranteed thoroughness in intellectual and scientific activities. Wisdom gained from such activities has equally provided useful insights for assessing, explaining, understanding or addressing much of human, societal or environmental problems. Various thinkers underline its contributions even to human development and science itself. Many are in the affirmative that it engenders progress in society (Oguejiofor, 2006). Asiegbu explains that its insights are ultimately employed into one's daily life and reflective activities (Asiegbu, 2011), while Ejeh (2009) emphasizes how it contributes to the growth of knowledge and human development. These are testimonies that philosophy is "enormously influential and universally appealed to in every sector of human existence" (Chinweuba, 2021).

The menace of environmental crisis is no exception. Its insights could guide every honest pursuit of environmental friendliness as implied in three of the four targets of MDG-7:

- to reverse the loss of environmental resources
- to achieve a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss
- to reverse the depletion of environmental resources

The unassumingly critical disposition of a philosopher leads him/her to a committed pursuit of this same goal of environmental sustainability. Though science may provide the take-off ground for such a discourse, it does not afford the deeper insight into the problem that would snowball into this millennial goal's demand of environmental sustainability, as the philosophical viewpoint would. The mistake of scientific approach in general consists in limiting itself to the empirical elements alone, like deforestation, lumbering, gas-flaring, or emission of GhGs, etc, in its conclusions on the phenomenon of environmental crisis or any other issue. Hence the inadequacy of building a reversal system for the ecosystem losses as required by MDG-7 on the scientific foundations alone. For this reason, Glasser (2011), following the example of Naess, accuses it of treating only the symptoms of ecocultural unsustainability, while leaving unaddressed the underlying causal structure of the problem (see, Talukder, 2018; Wanting, 2018). By that criticism, Glasser implies that environmental crisis means more than these "symptoms". Hence, addressing the malaise should entail going deeper, beginning with questions regarding the origination of the entire progression of the crisis. This is the task before the environmental philosopher – to dig, with the tool of critical inquiry, into the problematic, in order to find the fundamental reason behind, or cause of, the crisis. The search for this root cause (or the first principles of things) constitutes an essential part of any honest effort to respond to the demands of MDG-7. Discovering this goes a long way in inducing confidence in the global fight to redress the crisis and build environmental sustainability. The philosophical perspective exposes both policy makers and field workers to a comprehensive analysis of the problem, as it promises a holistic approach in the addressing the malaise.

Evaluation

A look at the present condition of environmental crisis and the global anxiety over the continuity of life in our threatened earth as a result of ever-increasing cases of this crises. Global environmental indices show that every environmental crisis has a global impact (Nwachukwu, 2021). This has remained a strain on contemporary society, irrespective of clime, race or tongue, hence its inclusion in the enlisted millennium goals for this 21st century. The exposition reveals too why scientific ecology, with its exclusively scientific method, has not achieved much in redressing the present condition of threatened nature, despite available volume of awareness, existing regulatory laws and regulatory bodies and agencies meant to implement them. This rude shock inspired this paper. Coupled with the perennial accusation that philosophy is detached from daily life, the paper embarked on this excursus for a three-fold goal: (a). to delineate the nature of philosophy, (b) underscore its relevance to human life and praxis, and (c) instantiate this by joining in the global search for environmental sustainability from the philosophical perspective.

Based on these facts of history, it becomes evident that the root of much of contemporary environmental crisis is "problematic relationship between humans and nature", or as Talukder aptly put it, "humans have not established a harmonious relationship with the environment" (Talukder, 2018). And to pinpoint this cause, Leopold and Routley held anthropocentrism responsible. Matthews (2010) interprets it as an "expression of human chauvinism" while Naess calls it "the result of our faulty economy". But for John Fielder, it is a crisis of values, perceptions, and beliefs. These different explanations altogether emboss the anthropogenic factor as the foundation of that instrumentalist mindset which not only arrogates the ascription of values only to human beings while interpreting nature as mere resource base for human use. Consequent upon this, the atmosphere is overheated with ever-increasing exploration and exploitation of nature, overcharged with the impressions of human overlordship. Thus, present cases of global warming, climate change, flooding, species losses, etc., are indicators that nature has become asphyxiated and unsafe, the ecosystems distorted, and the symbiotic relationship among the organisms within them stifled and broken. The outcome today is comparatively nothing less of "ecocatastrophe" (Talukder, 2018). In view of the demand of MDG-7, this counsel comes to mind:

> The environmental crisis is forcing us to examine some of our basic assumptions about our relationship to nature. It is essential that these philosophical issues become part of the larger public debate on the environment, so that our technical and economic options are also seen as choices that reflect certain beliefs and values in a philosophy of life (Fielder, 1991).

This would favour, instead, an efficient, wise sustainable governance of natural resources, energy, and materials, rather than pillaging or plundering the earth till the last drop of its resources is squeezed out (Copan, 2023). The outcome would be the reversal of depleted environments, ameliorate present crises, and engender a more friendly equanimous attitude towards nature that would ensure respect and responsible use of environmental goods.

Evaluation

This paper has undertaken to address the question of the relevance of philosophy to human life. This has been a perennial issue in both academic circles and in the society. The exploration made in this paper shows clearly that philosophy has never lost its relevance. Though poorly understood, as indicated in Afolayan's anecdotes or Suen's report, its main task, as we saw earlier, is to eliminate unfounded assumptions, ambiguities, doubts, and errors, while enhancing clarity and establishing strong rational foundations for our knowledge claims. Its penchant for thoroughness and "presuppositionlessness", either in the field of research or in the pursuit of personal dreams and development, makes it indeed the best guiding tool of life.

In this paper, the UN's MDG-7's demand for environmental sustainability offers us opportunity to ascertain the task of philosophy, and how this can assist humans in finding lasting (sustainable) solutions to practical human problems. The argument was able to establish that, contrary to widespread prejudices of being a whimsical time-wasting exercise quite bereft of any practical relevance, philosophy remains a performative and relevant tool, even in problem-solving. With its capability of

unearthing the bottlenecks in human life encounters, for example, in present environmental challenges, philosophy justifies its trust as love of wisdom and guide to balanced living. Its broad base applicability attests to, and guarantees, its practical import and relevance to human life.
Hopefully this re-establishes, on the first hand, the justification of philosophy's practical import, using UN's MDGs as a sample case. The paper shows how philosophy provides the enabling mental tool for problem-solving but direct involvement in addressing underlined needs is not treated here; that it leaves as theme for further research.

Conclusion

Philosophy remains relevant today as ever, contrary to subscribers to an exclusivist and lopsided perception of knowledge. As a rational discipline or activity which aims at the ultimate answer to any inquiry, its labours revolve mostly around eliminating unfounded assumptions and building indubitable foundations from first principles. The very nature of its object, wisdom, empowers the thinker's thrust for thoroughness in its acquisition process. Hence, as its answers leaves no room to ambiguities, doubts and errors, so does this apply in philosophers' responses to practical issues of life and society. The experience of near inadequacy of science itself, and other fields, to offer sustainable solution to environmental crisis adds to the urgency, relevance and critical outlook of philosophy in challenging human conditions as we have it today in our threatened environments.
With that capacity to unearth the bottlenecks, for example, in environmental discourse, and in underlining their root causes, philosophy's critical nature and comprehensive approach can be employed in any other instances of practical need. This is the case with the pursuit of MDG-7's demand for environmental sustainability. Contrary to widespread prejudices of being a whimsical time-wasting exercise, quite bereft of any practical relevance, this paper is able to show that philosophy remains a performative and relevant tool in problem-solving. These make philosophical reflection, the quest for wisdom, a broad base practice whose applicability extends to all fields of endeavour and problem-solving activities. This is a guarantee to its practical import and relevance to human life. Hopefully this re-establishes the justification its practical import, using UN's MDGs as a sample case, though the actual demonstration of how it addresses the underlined need is not treated here; that it leaves as theme for further research.
A few lessons from this paper includes the following:

- wisdom, the object of philosophical reflection, furnishes the possessor with in-depth insights into the nature of reality
- its critical questions guarantee a comprehensive overview of reality provides guiding light, even to scientific enquiry
- its goal of eliminating errors, doubts and ambiguities is not incompatible with scientific research and activities.

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