

STUDY UNIT 3

Plato - whole philosophy summed up.

"How should we live?"

"What is the meaning of life?"

Method of enquiry in philosophy that ask

"What is the meaning of life?"

= Existentialism (existence-ism) (Ex).

Philosophers at work.

Ex Found in all cultures.

Modern African philosophers tend to be Ex

existentialist

May Prove to be Africa's salvation.

philosophers

Modern times - well-known existentialist philosophers.

- Friedrich Nietzsche
- Jacques Derrida
- Kgalushi Koka
- Jean-Paul Sartre
- Frantz Fanon
- Michel Foucault
- Jean Baudrillard
- Luce Irigaray
- W E B du Bois
- Simone de Beauvoir.

Michel Foucault - French philosopher - concerned about influence of institutions on humans.

e.g. Schools, prisons, hospitals, police force
He said → Human beings are essentially free & unformed.

Institutions (even good ones) force people to conform to set of rules.

→ People become uncertain of themselves, afraid & artificial.

Question of Michel Foucault: "Are you yourself?"

Nihilism → Philosophers at work.

Opposite of existentialism is nihilism → "philosophy of nothing"

Nihilism → no purpose in life, no such thing as soul
Life is simply waste of time.

Strange → can cause violence & chaos
can also free people (especially those who grew up in repressive religious environments)

Existentialism can help us:

- Question other people's ideas & values
- Be open about ourselves
- Trust our instincts
- Spot fakes
- Enjoy life more.

Failings of ex:

- May make us too trusting
- Confusing
- May lead to despair
- May feel helpless & angry
- May be seriously disruptive.

Quick Summary

Ex → most important, discover meaning of life.

Ex → not just one meaning - Modern ex believe we must decide for ourselves what life is about.

Ex question: "Is this how I want to live my life?"

Black ex:

Scholar Lewis R Gordon contemplates situation of black people.

q: "What is to be done in a world of nearly a universal sense of superiority to, if not universal hatred of, black folk?"

Ex

"What is meaning of life?"

Depends on culture.

For last 200 y. western societies ignored ex in belief that technological progress could satisfy all human needs.

High price: social breakdown, violence, alienation & cynicism

STUDY UNIT 4

An African World.

People of Africa are still portrayed as being backwards, as needing the help of the West

African Philosophy: (AP)

St Augustine - most important person in Western Christian Church.

His book contained key ideas of later Christianity: belief of original sin, possibility of salvation through Christ and the Church and the need to work towards establishing God's Kingdom on earth.

In era of post-colonialism → had to develop social and economic philosophies that would enable Africa to develop.

AP → response to the problems and troubles of Africa and the domination of Western thought. African thinkers are keen to disprove Western belief that Africans are unable to develop a scientific and rational culture.

Confront q. what does it mean to say:
"I am an African"?

- AP consists of following methods of enquiry
- ethnic philosophy
 - Sage (wisdom) philosophy
 - political philosophy
 - pure philosophy.

ETHNIC PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy of Africa.

Consists of moral & religious beliefs of continent of Africa.

Vastness of continent, diversity of people

this philosophy shouldn't be simplified
Contains people's view of life and Africa's ability to criticise its own traditions.

Looks at "whole" experience of human beings.

SAGE (WISDOM) PHILOSOPHY

Focus on those individuals in society who are known to be wise & far-sighted & think critically

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Is unique.

Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, Léopold Senghor & Frantz Fanon = main representatives

* Must be peculiarly African Political philosophy, different from capitalist, socialist or communist political philosophies.
(Assumption).

PURE PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy done by African philosophers in empiricism, critical rationalism, existentialism.

Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, Henry Odera, Orelka, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Paulin Hountondji.

Philosophers at Work.

AP has its roots in spoken tradition

African traditional thought, like Western, ask of.

- How should I understand the Universe?
- Who and what is God?
- Who is my neighbour?
- What is my duty to my community?
- How should my community be governed and lead?

Western thought - puts individual at centre of life.

African thought - puts community at centre of life.

Community → shares features of Buddhist ideas.

→ vast, ever-expanding net of spiritual, psychological, biological and emotional relations.

→ shares the earth with the unborn, living spirits of the dead, earth, mountains & sky.

New Age movement owes great deal to African thought.

People who promoted.

- Kwame Anthony Appiah
- Peter Bodunrin
- Amílcar Cabral
- Frantz Fanon
- Segun Gbadegesin
- Kwame Gyekye
- Paulin Hountondji
- John Mbiti
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o
- Henry Odera Oruka
- Léopold Senghor
- Tsenay Serequeberhan
- Kwasi Wiredu

Ubuntuism.

Ubuntu is related to human happiness & well-being translated into English - "humanity"

"Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" ... human being is a human being through other human beings

Examples :

- Caring and sharing
- Forgiveness and reconciliation.

- Relatively non-violent transition of SA from totalitarian state to multi-party democracy.

- Peaceful co-existence among S.A ns in spite of differences.

Quick Summary.

Consist of ethnic, moral, political & wisdom philosophy.
It is a response to the problems Africa faces and to the centuries of European domination.
Holistic philosophy - shares ideas with Buddhist philosophy.

Community NB, and community's place in Universe
Partially consists of living for others.
Anti-materialistic philosophy.

AP can help us:

- Build communities
- Encourage human beings to be more humble.
- Give deeper understanding of ourselves
- Help appreciate mystery
- Re-examine need for tradition in human life.

AP can't help us:

- Doesn't challenge power structures.
- Doesn't accept women as men's equals.
- Doesn't encourage critical thinking
- Ignores needs of individual person
- Tolerates cruel superstitious practices (burning witches)

AP

- complex response to Africa's unique position in World.

Essentially form of existentialism.

Challenges arrogance of West.

Cannot ignore AP. - inner violence - human race became human in Africa.

A Contains enormous natural wealth & growing human population.