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# The Neglected Values of Philosophy in Contemporary Society: A Call for Curriculum Review in Ethiopian Higher Education

**Matusala Sundado**

Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wolaita Sodo University, Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia

**Email address:**

matusalasan@gmail.com

**To cite this article:**

Matusala Sundado. The Neglected Values of Philosophy in Contemporary Society: A Call for Curriculum Review in Ethiopian Higher Education. *Advances in Sciences and Humanities*. Vol. 5, No. 3, 2019, pp. 76-87. doi: 10.11648/j.ash.20190503.12

**Received:** June 20, 2019; **Accepted:** July 24, 2019; **Published:** August 12, 2019

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at exploring the values of philosophy in the contemporary Ethiopian society. In my view the values of philosophy are overlooked and deemphasized consciously or unconsciously due to various reasons. Philosophy is viewed by some people as insignificant discipline; a discipline too speculative and lacks practical value and no longer valuable in the era of science and technology. However, addressing the following questions is relevant to resolve such misunderstandings: Is philosophy really worthless to the contemporary society? What are the values, if any, of philosophy for contemporary society in general and Ethiopian society in particular? Does philosophy contribute for learners in understanding sciences? To address these questions, therefore, the researcher employed philosophical methods of analysis and phenomenology. The focus of this paper is critically explaining philosophy's practical impact on contemporary Ethiopian society. It points out that philosophy is significant for multi-faceted human development – social, political, intellectual and spiritual. I believe and recommend that a little dosage of philosophical training is important in general for citizens and students of higher education in particular. Some of the reasons are that philosophy can enable one to develop critical thinking dispositions, equips one to reason correctly and enables to engage in critical examination and analysis of different social issues. Above all, I firmly believe that a proper training in philosophy is essential to contribute to the development of a country. Hence, this paper offers valuable insights and suggestions for ministry of education and higher institutions to re-examine the mission and objective of education policy of Ethiopia whether it supports and promotes the production of critical citizens. All in all, it is a clarion call for curriculum review in Ethiopian higher education which overlooked the values of philosophy.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Critical Thinking, Higher Education, Ethiopia

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I argue that critical and rational thinking skills are undoubtedly essential to address the problems of humanity. In order to acquire and develop these values of philosophy students of higher education in Ethiopia need to learn philosophy as a course in class because exposure to philosophical ideas and discourses in schools creates opportunity to philosophize in the class room and outside it.

Students are introduced to skills of rational analysis of issues, constructive criticism of arguments, and examination of various problems that arise in both academic and social life; and develop skills how to solve various problems. In other words, the value of philosophy is critical and

immeasurable in human life. Because the ability to think clearly and creatively as well as the capacity to solve problems is fundamental to any profession as well as any course— be it teaching, medicine, law, engineering, physics or political science. And success and satisfaction in any profession is the outcome of these philosophical dispositions. Above all, to put in Socrates' word, "the unexamined life is not worth living." To put differently, reflected life is worth living, for it enables us to find effective ways to confront the limits and conditions of our habit as well as provides us with alternative ways of observation and thinking about the world. Accordingly, in order to acquire and develop such values in both academic and social life students need to take philosophy courses, and revising higher education curricula

of Ethiopia universities is critical. One of the main reasons is that, to my knowledge, the current curricula in each department seem to overlook and/or misunderstand the values of the parent-science just assuming it worthless. Yet the researcher strongly believes in the revision of each departments' curriculum and recommends introduction to philosophy course for the students. Because primarily philosophy casts light on other areas of sciences as it is the discipline that investigates the most fundamental problems of society. Secondly, it introduces students with critical reflection applicable in numerous areas of academic as well as social life. Finally, philosophy nourishes the habit of thoughts and characters that are vital to sustain democratic citizenship such as culture of tolerance, reasoned argument, dialogue and appreciation and respect of diversity in society.

## 2. Why Philosophy for Higher Education Students

Before discussing the need of philosophy for university students, I think it is important to begin defining what philosophy<sup>1</sup> is, for definition helps us to understand the essential characteristics of philosophy. Providing precise definition of philosophy, however, is not as such easy as we could give the definition of, say, psychology or biology. The definition of these disciplines could be accepted by scholars without any disagreement because these fields of study deal with specific subjects. On the contrary, since philosophy deals with various issues, and lacks distinct subject matter it is difficult to have the definition of philosophy in a way that all scholars could agree [1].

Nevertheless, to make clear the characteristics and theme of philosophy, it is good to explain what philosophy is in brief. Philosophy could be understood in two different ways. In the loose sense, it refers to "a world view or principle that guides people's life" [2]. This means that philosophy in common sense approach refers to "a way through which individuals or group of individuals try to make sense out of human experience" [2]. We often hear someone talk "my philosophy of life or profession is this or that." This understanding of philosophy consists of the belief and value systems held by individuals' experience and interpretation of the world. Nonetheless, the meaning assigned to philosophy in ordinary sense, which could be possessed by any rational person, does not exhibit the unique property of philosophy as a discipline that requires further training. Yet, this is not the notion of philosophy I want to address and articulate in this paper.

On the other hand, philosophy in strict sense, as a discipline refers to professional activity held by professionals. Here philosophy is understood as a rational and critical activity done by professional persons and pursued in academic institutions and other areas being exposed to

philosophical discussions, arguments, explanation and above all wisdoms pursued by various philosophers. Philosophy in professional sense, as Okolo states, is understood as "a critical enterprise, sometimes dynamic, a quest, a search indeed; ...defined as a spirit of evaluative exploration or inquiry into all areas of human experience, of the world in which we live, man himself and his place in the universe" [quoted in 2]. To put in Miller's and Jensen's words, philosophy is "the attempt to think rationally and critically about the most important questions" [3]. And this definition points out the hallmark of philosophy which includes critical examination, analysis and reflection over the eternal questions of humanity. As Louis Pojman states:

[Philosophy] is the contemplation or study of the most important questions in existence with the end of promoting illumination and understanding, a vision of the whole. It uses reason, sense of perception, the imagination, and intuition in its activities of clarifying concepts and analyzing and constructing arguments and theories as possible answers to these perennial questions [Quoted in 4].

As Krishnananda pointed out, philosophy deals with the all-encompassing life of humanity whereas other sciences deal with specific issues of human life. He states:

Philosophy is a well coordinated and systematised attempt at evaluating life and the universe as a whole, with reference to first principles that underlie all things as their causes and are implicit in all experience.... an impartial approach to all problems and aspects of life and existence and its studies are not devoted merely to the empirical world, as in the case of the physical and biological sciences; not restricted to the provinces of faith and authority or to the questions of the other world, as is the case with theological disquisition; not confined to investigation of mind and its behaviour, as in psychology; not given over merely to casuistry and aetiology, as in the normative science of morality and ethics; not taken up with the consideration of civic duties and problems of administration and constitution, as in the case of politics; not concerned with the solution of problems and techniques of adjusting and ordering and discovering the origin of organisation and development of human society, like economics and sociology.... [5].

Moreover, Krishnananda asserts that:

It (philosophy) is an attempt at a complete knowledge of being in all the phases of its manifestation in various processes of consciousness. The discovery of ultimate meaning... It is the art of the perfect life, the science of reality, the foundation of the practice of righteousness, the law of the attainment of freedom and bliss [5].

To put differently, addressing metaphysical, epistemological and ethical issues and questions rationally and critically rather than relying on baseless assumptions is what makes philosophy what it is.

Having a brief meaning of philosophy, now it is sensible to address the aforementioned question whether students of higher education need philosophy. In other words, what is the

<sup>1</sup> Etymologically the term philosophy is derived from the Greek words *philo* which means love and *sophia* which means wisdom. Hence, philosophy is the love of wisdom.

value of studying philosophy for university students?

It is believed that one of the reasons that human beings are different from other species, say a cow or lion is due to their reasoning capacity. We are endowed with this ability and rationality is the essence of human beings. But one can raise the question: why do humans in general and students in particular need philosophy since reason is natural as the great Greek philosopher, Aristotle, states 'man is by nature a rational animal'. This means that all human beings are naturally endowed with reason. Even though reason is unique to humans, we are instinctual beings as well as emotional. But which one must have a guide in human life to lead successful life in this world? Reason or emotion? Needless to say, be it in social or academic arena a life guided by reason is successful, but when human mind is controlled and dominated by emotion it is ruinous.

A man who abandons, as Rand states, reason leads a life of terror [6]. This points out that, humans need methods of correct reasoning in order to understand and give solution for their problems. To state in Rand's words, "as a human being you have no choice about the fact you need a philosophy. Your only choice is whether you define your philosophy by a conscious, rational, disciplined process of thought...or let your subconscious accumulate a junk heap of unwarranted conclusions..." [6]. Thus, principles and methods of correct reasoning are acquired through learning and this is possible when one is exposed to philosophical trainings. Through correct reasoning raw data of perceptual are integrated into concepts. And this process of integration equips man with knowledge of the universe that enables him or her to reason, act and live as a 'full functioning' man.

On the other hand, one may raise a question like: is philosophy the only course which allows students to develop critical thinking? Don't other subjects such as, for example, physics, mathematics or history contribute to reflective thinking and critical examination of issues? Of course there are many fields of study which employ reason as the tool to examine, analyze and explicate problems. But their scope is limited not only to their subject matter but also to specific issues that could be addressed by the subjects. This is to say that there are certain issues beyond the inquiry of these subjects. There are actually some fundamental issues which are essential in human life and must be critically addressed such as metaphysical, epistemological or ethical ones. But no matter how their inquiries are important, such issues are not addressed in, for instance, physics, mathematics or history, for such issues are beyond their scope.

In short, we need philosophy not only due to its practical purpose but also to answer fundamental philosophical questions that are unavoidable in human life and which needs possible answers because the methods we employ and the authorities we appeal to answer these questions determine directly or indirectly the fate of humanity in this world. Human beings often raise philosophical questions such as where do we come from? Where do we go after death? What is the end of human life? How do we know something? Why should we act morally? Do we have a duty to support the

needed? These questions, and many others, are timeless and inevitable; and addressing them critically and rationally is undoubtedly significant to face boldly various problems that arise in the life of humankind. Accordingly, a proper training in philosophy is important to address fundamental questions that obsess humanity.

As I have attempted to point out on the above paragraph, philosophy plays a unique role and has distinctive purpose in human life. Questions like "who we are?", "Why we are in this world?", or "what should we do to live in the society?" are indispensable philosophical questions which requires practical rational explanation.

Philosophy is often criticized for being too abstract and speculative, and philosophers are obsessed with issues and questions that are not answerable. Indeed philosophy discusses about abstract issues. However, grappling with abstract issues does not mean that they are futile and worthless. If we consider well such apparently abstract issues and questions are not separated from our life. They are closely related to our real social, political, moral or religious life. Philosophy, although, cannot give us answers for all questions it raises, it can give us an opportunity to look at things from a different angle. It can provide us with alternative vision of reality and contribute in suggesting solutions for problems that we encounter in our life.

As Ewelu points out:

the relevance of philosophy is unquestionable in the face of the multifarious problems it enables man to solve in his life. Even when it does not actually solve the problem, it guides man on the best approach to adopt to avoid being weighed down when faced with such problems [7].

Consequently, philosophy is not a meaningless and valueless enterprise engages in issues insignificant to human life. Abstract issue, for example, whether there is a transcendent being, whether there is purpose for humanity, whether there is life after death, how do we know the existence of these all and so on, are critically significant to be discussed. These questions are not nonsense but rather their proper and rational explanation is worthy for the existence of human beings in the universe. Because raising these and other metaphysical, epistemological and ethical questions may help humans directly or indirectly address fundamental problems of their lives critically and rationally rather than being dependent on mythological explanations and baseless assumptions.

To sum up, philosophy is not mere speculation and abstraction. It is not too far from practical life as some people argue. Conversely, philosophy has practical import in human life. It is an enabling power that "shapes the mind and character of men and the destiny of nations" [6]. Philosophy is the best weapon to fight against and demolish irrational ideas and superstitious beliefs which impede human persons to achieve their goals. Being a critical enterprise, the task of philosophy is to cast the light of consciousness upon the world views of humans, which enable us to shape our lives. As Max Horkheimer stated, philosophy being 'critical enlightenment', protect us from being swallowed by "those

ideas and activities which the existing order of society instills into its members” [8]. Thus, investigating critically and examining practices and habits that are normally taken for granted, and can be obstacles to socio-political as well as economic progress is one of indispensable factors to lead in the path of development.

Above all, philosophy should not be feared. We have to cultivate it. Here, one has to be very cautious which philosophy is adopted and adhered because one’s philosophical view serves as an enabling force to address societal problems in a good or bad way depending on the beliefs he or she hold.

### 3. The Overlooked Values of Philosophy in Ethiopian Higher Education

A higher education is an education center where young students could discuss issues, explicate ideas, and attempt to resolve problems that occur in both academic and social life. One of the goals of a higher education is to enable students to develop the skills and dispositions of critical thinking. What is critical thinking, then? Though scholars have attempted to define it in various ways depending on their disciplines, for the purpose of this paper critical thinking is defined as the degree to which one employs reasoning as a tool to solve his/her problems instead of relying on other authorities. Here I have mentioned some of the definitions which help us to understand the term better. According to the APA Delphi Research Report ( The American Philosophical Association 1990), critical thinking is defined as "...purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based” [quoted in 9].

It is “a reasoned, purposive, and introspective approach to solve problems or addressing questions, with incomplete evidence and information, and for an incontrovertible unlikely” [10]. Moreover, Diane Halpern mentions some of the following as the main features of critical thinking: “reasoning/logic, judgment, metacognition, reflection, questioning and mental processes” [11]. The following are some of the skills and attitudes of a critical thinker, as enumerated by Stella Cottrell: “identifying other people’s positions, arguments and conclusions; identifying false and unfair assumptions; drawing conclusions about whether arguments are valid and justifiable, based on good evidence and sensible assumptions” [quoted in 11].

Moreover, there are six core critical thinking skill as mentioned by California Critical Thinking skills Test User Manual:

1. Interpretation: To comprehend and express the meaning or significance of a wide variety of experiences, situations, data, events, judgments, conventions, beliefs, rules, procedures or criteria.
2. Analysis: To identify the intended and actual inferential

relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions or other forms of representation intended to express beliefs, judgments, experiences, reasons, information, or opinions.

3. Evaluation: To assess the credibility of statements or other representations which are accounts or descriptions of a person's perception, experience, situation, judgment, belief, or opinion; and to assess the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions or other forms of representation.
4. Inference: To identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions; to form conjectures and hypotheses; to consider relevant information and to deduce [sic] the consequences flowing from data, statements, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation.
5. Explanation: To state the results of one's reasoning; to justify that reasoning in terms of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological and contextual considerations upon which one's results were based; and to present one's reasoning in the form of cogent arguments.
6. Self-regulation: Self-consciously to monitor one's cognitive activities, the elements used in those activities, and the results deduced, particularly by applying skills in analysis and evaluation to one's own inferential judgments with a view toward questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting either one's reasoning or one's results [quoted in 9].

The aforementioned critical thinking skills are also discussed in the Delphi Project [12]. Needless to say, critical thinking skills and dispositions are undoubtedly important to society in general and higher education students in particular to challenge presuppositions and solve personal and professional problems [13].

One may raise a question: what makes a higher education “higher”? The vital role of higher education is not just communicating bodies of knowledge, no matter how important this is. But at this level of education imparting dispositions of critical inquiry is much more significant. What makes a higher education different from primary or secondary level education is its role to inculcate the aforementioned skills and dispositions and produce critical and independent thinkers who can resolve problems that they encounter in academic as well as social life.

The American educationalist Benjamin Bloom, in his Cognitive Taxonomy of Learning, indicates different levels of knowledge. As he stated they can be demonstrated in students’ life in the following ways:

1. *Knowledge – demonstrated in outlining, recounting, defining and enumerating ideas;*
2. *Comprehension – demonstrated in paraphrasing, recognizing, illustrating and explaining ideas;*
3. *Application – demonstrated in transferring, employing and organizing ideas;*

4. *Analysis – demonstrated in breaking down, categorizing, comparing and contrasting ideas;*
5. *Synthesis – demonstrated in summarizing, generalizing about, integrating and constructing ideas and arguments;*
6. *Evaluation – demonstrated in appraising, discriminating between and assessing ideas or resolving problems and arguments [14].*

Accordingly, students at higher education are exposed to the environment that makes them to be mastered in 'higher order' thinking skills which help them to break down concepts and ideas, construct their own ideas by synthesizing issues and develop their own critical judgment about an issue instead of cultivating 'lower level' thinking skills such as memorizing, describing, listing, etc. In other words, students at higher education are to be exposed not only to develop critical thinking skills and dispositions but also learn disciplines that enable them to develop such dispositions.

What makes a higher education "higher" is that when it emphasizes on reflective ways of thinking, cultivates rational methods of investigation and exhibits bias and prejudice free judgment. Unless a higher education inculcates these enlightenment ideals and fail to meet them, it is not different from catechism class where catechumens are required to have a rotten memorization and recitation of religious teachings instead of critically questioning them. In catechism classes, as I experienced, a catechist asserts loudly what he has memorized and catechumens just repeat and repeat until they master by memorizing. There is no chance to raise the 'why' questions, discuss the teachings and critically analyze the assertions. Needless to say, when students at higher education are forced to swallow ideas or assertions blindly as the catechumens do, they are handicapped to face the challenges they encounter in their social as well as academic life. Hence, being analytic and skeptic is healthy for students to fight against gullibility. Above all, a higher education which neglects such dispositions of critical inquiry cannot allow students to realize their potential of rational judgment.

The task of a higher education is to create a conducive environment for students to develop critical thinking skills through the course they learn in the class. As recent researches indicate, developing students' ability to think critically about and across subjects studied is core learning outcome of higher education [10]. Despite the importance of critical thinking in students' life, researchers have found low level of it in them and higher education has not met its goal [15]. According to these scholars, students who graduate lack critical thinking skills and are not capable to employ these skills at their work place.

Though critical thinking is often a stated educational goal encouragement and development of critical thinking in university class rooms is rare [16]. Over all, the university system does not consistently produce critical thinkers [15].

So what is the antidote of such corruptive dispositions of higher education? Is there any discipline or field of study which can lead us to meet the enlightenment ideals of higher education? I can argue boldly that there is a discipline which

can enable students to exercise and adopt the enlightenment ideals of higher education, i.e. philosophy, no matter how other social and natural sciences do but the degree and extent of exposing students to critical and reflective thinking in depth vary as the issues discussed in each discipline. Hence, in my view philosophical attitudes, skills and habits can cure higher education from any ailment that obstacle enlightenment ideals. Above all, a healthy dose of skepticism is undoubtedly essential in higher education, and the goal of higher education is to create an environment that enables students to cultivate and develop the enlightenment ideals rather than blindly accepting others' assertions and ideas.

In many universities which offer degree in philosophy the objective of philosophy is clearly stated. For instance, according to Castleton University, the purpose of philosophy is

to provide a foundation in philosophy and to support the development of effective development skills. Our students develop their own perspectives on the nature of reality, knowledge and value. The critical thinking they acquire through disciplined philosophizing are both invaluable for the reflective life and excellent support for any professional career [17].

James Madison University also states that:

The study of philosophy helps us to enhance our ability to solve problems (by analyzing concepts, definitions, arguments and problems), our communication skills (by providing some of the basic tools of self-expression – for instance, skills in presenting ideas through well-constructed, systematic arguments – that other fields either do not use or use less extensively), our persuasive powers (by providing training in the construction of clear formulations, good arguments and appropriate examples), and our writing skills (by teaching interpretative writing through its examination of challenging texts, comparative writing through emphasis on fairness to alternative position, argumentative writing through developing students ability to establish their own views and descriptive writing through detailed portrayal of concrete examples [18].

Here also it is good to mention the role of Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, the only university which has been teaching philosophy courses since 1950's. In 1950's, in the University college of Addis Ababa different departments of the faculty of Arts and Science teach several courses of philosophy such as Logic, Epistemology and Ethics to all first and second year students as "general courses" and Metaphysics and Philosophical Psychology as "common course" to third and fourth year students. But the department of philosophy started enrolling the first batch of students majoring philosophy in 1977/78 academic year. At the end of 1989/90 academic year, however, its degree program was suspended because of government policy change. After a decade and a half interruption, the department commenced its degree program and currently running PhD program too. According to the department's course objective, the following are some of the benefits that students acquire by

studying philosophy:

The graduates will be able to appreciate, display and demonstrate: strong power of analysis and exposition; understanding of fundamental problems and issues that are common to various intellectual disciplines; intellectual and moral habits that sustain a culture of tolerance and respect for humanitarian values [19].

However, currently in Ethiopia there are forty nine public universities but philosophy is being thought in two universities and logic is given as “common course” in few departments. This implies that the aforementioned value of philosophy is not addressed to students.

Needless to say, the role of philosophy is significant to meet the goal of current education policy of Ethiopia which aims at enhancing the quality of science education in Ethiopia. Philosophical dispositions and skills are foundation for doing science, for science requires the dispositions of being creative, imaginative and intuitive to solve scientific problems and puzzles. Philosophy is relevant in all walks of human life as argued by C. S. Momoh in the following statements.

Philosophy is the base and apex, the foundation, the ceiling and the roof of any civilization, any religion and any science. Indeed any discipline...it is queen and king of all the disciplines, where philosophy is present, there is light, where it is absent, there is darkness [quoted in 4].

This points out that critical examination of the path that guides and facilitates to achieve the goal of current Ethiopian education policy (which gives more emphasis to natural science subjects) is significant by answering questions: why the current education policy is de-emphasizing the roles of social sciences and humanities in general and philosophy in particular? And what do higher education students lack if they are not exposed to philosophical skills and dispositions in particular?

Of course, the importance of natural and physical sciences to society is unquestionable. They play vital role in the development of a country and their practical value is indubitable. For instance, without the outputs of science and technology I would have not communicated by writing what was in my mind. All that I have used to convey my ideas to the readers are the products of science and technology. Moreover, science help us boost needs of body i.e. enable us to fulfill physiological and maintenance needs.

Nonetheless, human beings also need satisfaction of the needs of mind because we are composed of body and mind. But can we function as a full person without fulfilling the needs of mind? I hardly think so. Therefore, the needs of mind are fulfilled by philosophy as Bertrand Russell persuasively argues: “It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time” [20]. Philosophy enables us to satisfy ‘self-actualization needs’ by exposing us to critical thinking attitudes. Azenabor states that:

Philosophy may not be practical study or of immediate

practical ability, but it contains what is finest and noblest in human life because it is concerned not with production of material wealth, but with the advancement of the wealth of the mind [quoted in 7].

Furthermore, Martha Nussbaum, in her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, persuasively argues that knowledge, skills and dispositions acquired through arts and humanities-based education are necessary for democratic citizenship. According to her, educational policy and practices that overlooks the value of humanities and liberal arts, which inculcate critical thinking and empathy in human beings, is in silent crisis which result in the long run the loss of democratic self-government. She states:

Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their system of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements. The future of the world’s democracies hangs in the balance [21].

Furthermore, Allemang shares the same concern with Nussbaum stating: “when education begins to be assessed purely in terms of market responsiveness and economic growth, both democracy and human decency are put at risk” [cited in 22].

In short, what I argue is that if the attitude of critical and rational thinking is overlooked, students may lead a life little or no different from an average person whose whole life is overwhelmed by superstition. A higher education that neglects the values of philosophical thinking, no matter how the students are trained in technical skills, is forcing students to live in the world of oblivion. On the contrary, when students are exposed to disciplines that help them develop their analytic and reflective power of their mind, undoubtedly the doors of creativity, imagination, invention and discovery will be opened widely. As Nussbaum argues, both “education for profit” and “education for democracy” requires the humanities which inculcate skills such as critical thinking, responsibility, stewardship and creative innovation necessary for democratic citizenship [21].

This indicates out that learning philosophy enables students to be critical and can help them understand other courses better, for it creates conducive environment to analyze, examine, reflect on issues and concepts of other subjects. This is because doubt or wonder is the not only the source of philosophy but also the foundation of scientific inventions. Above all, understanding of science and acquiring scientific knowledge requires learning by posing questions, exploring phenomena, critically analyzing data and reflecting on the adequacy of scientific claims. In other words, as noted by Popper, critical discussion is significant in the advancement of science [23]. Undoubtedly students of natural sciences in general and social sciences in particular can get benefits by attending philosophy classes because

understanding these subjects requires critical inquiry and observation of data. To understand, for instance, physics or biology better, students of higher education need to have exposed to philosophical training and discourse at their freshman/ preparatory level.

Hence, it is not hard to think about students' future lives that are not exposed to such values of philosophy in their higher education. Such students may fear to engage in inquires beyond their experience.

Besides this, Plato's well known Allegory of the Cave<sup>2</sup> may illustrate better the whole feature of students who lack a tincture of philosophical attitude in their academic as well as social life.

For the sake of reaching at common understanding, I would like to present Plato's Allegory of the Cave in brief [24].

Plato asks us to imagine human beings living since their childhood in an underground cave whose entrance open to the light. They are forced to face the inside wall of the cave because their necks and legs chained so that they cannot move. Behind prisoners there is fire burning, and between the fire and the prisoners, there is an elevated way on which people walk carrying all sorts of artificial objects including statues of men, animal and trees which project above the wall. The prisoners cannot see one another or the wall behind them on which the objects are being carried. All they can see are the shadows reflected on the wall of the cave in front of them. Throughout their life the prisoners see only shadows of reality and hear only echoes from the wall. They cling to their familiar shadows and to their prejudices, and if they were released from the chain and see the objects which produce the shadows, they would be confused and believe the objects that they are watching now are not real and prefer their shadowy world. But if one of the prisoners forced to be free and dragged out of the cave, he would see the objects of the real world as they truly are.

Now let us think of the lives of people who were imprisoned in the cave throughout their life and what they know of reality outside the cave. As described in the allegory, the people in the cave are living in semi darkness throughout their lives never knowing that what they know is only shadows. They are not only ignorant of their bondage and themselves but also remained ignorant of reality.

What is the meaning of the Allegory of the Cave in today's world? With what in human life in general and student's life in particular may the allegory be compared?

Sticking to my objective it is, though one can interpret it depending on his/her own purpose, the allegory of our education system that must "ascend through stages of education from the darkness of intellectual and moral confusion in its everyday beliefs to the light of true knowledge and values" [25].

It may be taken as the criticism of students' life imprisoned with superstition derived from various cultures, superficial

knowledge based on opinion, arrogant dogmatism and customs never open to liberating doubt. For such students everything that they encounter seems clear and definite. On the other hand, what they learn in, for example, science classes seem as strange and challenging to accept. They are contemptuous to unfamiliar explanation about their environment. And above all, they refuse to accept rational justifications and views that challenge their cherished beliefs, and content with accepting ideas and opinions blindly instead of critically questioning them.

What is, then, the value of higher education after all if it does not *force* students to turn in the direction of truth and reality and ascend in to the upper region of truth and reality? Student of higher education are required to develop logical and analytic thinking. And it is the role of higher education to produce critical thinkers. Hence, a higher education which does not create environment for such dispositions of critical inquiry and where skepticism is not valued as an academic stance, undoubtedly impedes students to realize their potential and "producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements", to use the words of Nussbaum [21]. In my view, philosophy can play such a role of ascending to reality because it is a rational and critical field of study which enables students to get rid of any kind of "ignorance, superstition, prejudice, blind acceptance of ideas, and any other form of irrationality" [3]. And it is an imperative to expose students to philosophical skills and attitudes, as Miller and Jensen point out, philosophy "challenges our ideas, analyzes them and tests them in light of evidence and arguments" [3]. By and large, if students are denied of access to equip with critical questioning and observation of their environment, it is hard to materialize the goal of higher education which aims at the development of this country through the fruits of science and technology. Therefore, critical thinking is essential to employ the fruits of science and technology efficiently and ethically. A student must have the ability to examine social, political, economic or environmental issues and critically examine how these issues are interwoven to one another. Critical thinking skills will allow students to work in complex academic as well as social situations. On the other hand, students lack such dispositions will blindly accept ideas and assertions as they are presented by any authority. As Horkheimer states, the value of philosophy to students lies in its criticality.

Philosophy insists that the actions and aims of man must not be the product of blind necessity. Neither the concepts of science nor the form of social life, neither the prevailing way of thinking nor the prevailing mores should be accepted by customs and practiced uncritically [8].

To sum up, the assumption that philosophy is too far from practical life is simply not to understand what philosophy is meant for. As I have attempted to discuss philosophy can play important role in students' life not only to critically examine their academic problems but also to engage in philosophical reflection and deliberation specific to our

<sup>2</sup> An allegory is a kind of story in which the characters and events being described are understood as representing other things which are similar.

societal problems.

#### 4. The Role of Philosophy in Contemporary Society

Philosophy undoubtedly plays vital role in contemporary society by opening critical path to solve problems that people encounter in day to day life. People encounter issues that urge them to make relevant decisions in social, political, economic and moral affairs. These affairs of human beings needs critical and reflective approach to resolve the problems related with each issues. Undoubtedly a citizen exposed even to introductory courses of philosophy will be enabled to develop the following important features of attitudes and habits of mind required by critical thinkers:

respect for reasons and truth (commitment to having justified beliefs, values and actions); respect for high-quality products and performances (appreciation of good design and effective performance); an inquiring attitude (inclination to assess the support for judgments one is asked to accept); open-mindedness (disposition to withhold judgment and seek new evidence or points of view when existing evidence is inadequate or continuous, and willingness to revise one's view should the evidence warrant it); fair-mindedness (commitment to understanding and giving fair consideration to alternative points of view, disposition to seek evidence or reasons that may tell against one's view); independent-mindedness (possession of the intellectual honesty and courage necessary for seeking out relevant evidence and basing one's belief and actions on it, despite pressures or temptations to do otherwise, and the personal strength to stand up for one's family grounded beliefs); respect for others in group inquiry and deliberation (commitment to open, critical discussion in which all persons are given a fair hearing and their feelings as well as their interests are taken into account); respect for legitimate intellectual authority (appreciation of the importance of giving due weight to the views of persons who satisfy the criteria for being an authority in a relevant area of study or practice); and an intellectual work-ethic (commitment to carrying out relevant thinking tasks in a competent manner) [quoted in 26].

These attitudes and habits of mind are critically important to resolve multifaceted problems of society and foster values and skills which are vital to peaceful and harmonious coexistence of humanity in this planet. Moreover, as Fullerton has argued, philosophy has a practical value to society at large. In the following statements he explains how studying philosophy is noteworthy and practical.

Philosophical studies are not dry, when men are properly taught, and are in a position to understand what is said. They deal with the most fascinating of problems. It is only necessary to pierce through the husk of words which conceals the thoughts of the philosopher, and we shall find the kernel palatable, indeed. Nor are such studies

profitless...[27].

In the next section, I shall attempt to highlight the roles of philosophy in various human life such as moral, epistemological, social and intellectual life.

##### 4.1. Philosophy and Moral Issues

People often encounter moral problems in their daily activities. These problems unless addressed correctly they might be obstacles to social, political and economic relations. Moral problems are to be solved in a critical manner. Hence, we need moral principles which are understood by rational persons so as to resolve moral problems. In other words, the significance of moral theories is indubitable in order to judge a particular human conduct and action as right or wrong. This points out that the significance of studying Moral Philosophy (Ethics) which help us to address and explicate moral problems in a reflective and critical way rather than blindly accepting the problems as well as projecting to some transcendent condition where people often want to escape from moral responsibility. We often hear people asserting that the evil spirit (Satan) deceived me to do this or that sort of wrong action. They like to pass over their responsibility to some other entity as if they were helpless and powerless to act in a moral and righteous way. Rather than taking their responsibility, often people blame evil spirits. For example, if a person misacts and caught red handed, he/she would reply: "the devil has tempted me to do such bad deed." This implies that people are not only unaware of being autonomous moral agents but also ignorant of their unique property as a rational and self-conscious ones. Humans are free and endowed with a free will. They are not dependent on certain evil realities and their life and fate is not determined by them. Instead of blaming some authorities for their misbehavior and misdeeds, humans should look at their inner selves.

By and large, humans must engage in reflective thinking to address moral problems that affect the interest and welfare of both humans and non-human beings. Developing reflective morality, such as questioning and criticizing conventional moral values, is therefore more important than cherishing conventional morality which encourages blind acceptance of authorities as a source and author of moral values, who are unchallengeable and unquestioned ones.

##### 4.2. Philosophy and Knowledge

We need philosophy to address the problems of foundation of knowledge: that is whether knowledge is possible, whether human beings can know this world and so are eternal questions and answering them critically is significant to human life in this planet. The issues of knowledge such as whether man can certainly know this physical world is basic one that must be addressed in a rational way. The question whether this physical world is knowable and understandable by human intellect is significant and fundamental issue to determine the fate of humanity. The quest for knowledge made the inquisitive mind to develop science and technology to solve human problems and to investigate the universe



further. What would our world look like if humans fear to quest, investigate, inquire and examine?

#### **4.3. Philosophy and Political Life**

The importance of philosophy in political life is unquestionable. In political life questions such as what is a good life? What is justice? And many others are vital questions to the society. Above all, who should rule the state and how the ruled should be ruled is basic one. As the great Greek political thinker, Plato has pointed out in order to establish a just state which promotes the public good a ruler must obtain philosophical training. One of the main reasons is that philosophy allows him/her to approach political affairs in a critical way; above all a ruler or a statesman should be guided by reason rather than personal feelings or emotions when attempting to resolve problems. The ruler is not biased and prejudiced when he/she encounters issues that need settlement. In other words, when a ruler is guided by reason the state is in peace but when emotion dominates the soul of the ruler it is ruinous to the state as Plato persuasively argues in the Republic [24].

Accordingly, in political life a little dosage of training in philosophy for the rulers is indubitable and has a great import to rule the society without any moral blame and to create a just society. A ruler who has got a tincture of philosophical training may lead a virtuous life which is free from corruption, greed and immorality, for philosophical training may cultivate the disposition of honesty, public mindedness, integrity and prioritizing is good for the public instead of running the office to fulfill private personal interests.

#### **4.4. Philosophy and Correct Reasoning**

Philosophy plays vital role in teaching how to reason correctly. Correct reasoning is significant not only to persuade the audience in a rational way but to resolve the dispute in a peaceful manner. However, fallacious reasons are deceptive and often result in conflict. But when we win our discussion or arguments based on acceptable evidence without resorting to illegitimate appeals, in one way or the other we can develop a sound and peaceful relation among others.

Hence, correct reasoning is important to settle disagreements or conflict easily if the parties are willing to have round-table discussions, for an argument based on evidence that is free from any bias or personal judgment and prejudices can produce effective communication among the disputing parties. As a result, a small dosage of training in logic, the principle of correct reasoning, is undoubtedly imperative for the youth and unquestionably important to establish unity among diversified community. Stressing the importance of studying Logic, Fullerton persuasively argues that:

No one who has not tried to introduce the average under graduate to logic can realize how blindly he uses his reasoning power, how unconscious he is of the full meaning of the sentences he employs, how easily he may

be entrapped by fallacious reasoning where he is not set on his guard by some preposterous conclusion touching matters with which he is familiar [27]

The value of philosophy is uncountable and immense for people who are brought up in various cultures, religions, traditions and customs. In this section I will attempt to analyze the value of philosophy in Ethiopia context which is the home of diversified community who has its own cultures. Here I would like to address certain issues that need critical reflection and inquiry to create unity in diversity.

#### **4.5. Philosophy for Unity in Diversity**

Ethiopia is the home of nations and nationalities whose diversified cultures attract many tourists from abroad as well as from home country. There are more than eighty languages as well as diversified traditions and religious belief systems. The current motto of the government is ‘Unity in Diversity’ – which preaches oneness of all nations, nationalities and people of Ethiopia.

The notion of unity in diversity (one in many) is not a new concept for philosophers or students who are exposed to metaphysical discussion in philosophy. The oneness of things is addressed by ancient Greek philosophers to resolve the problem of many in things. According to them, even though there are many entities around us they share the same essence. This metaphysical concept suggests that though humans in general and Ethiopians in particular have different cultures, traditions or meanings, from the very beginning we humans share the same identity or essence that makes us one being but not many. This essence is Humanness.

Accordingly, whether you are Amhara, Wolaita, Tigraway or Oromo, which are accidental features just as our height, weight or color that cannot prevent us from being a human you share the same essence/identity with other human beings that live not only in Ethiopia but also in other parts of this world. One might raise the question of precedence i.e. being Wolaita or being a human come first? It is obvious that the latter precedes the former. The essence depicts the nature of a being than the accident. Hence, humanness is what we all share and makes us one though we have various accidental features.

This notion of unity in diversity is familiar to students who exposed to introductory lessons of philosophy and enables them to see every person at least in equal status unless he/she is blinded by prejudices passed by his/her generations. Even if a person is born from a different ethnic group and speaks a different language, he/she is the same human person by virtue of being a human person. Language, ethnicity and other features are accidents rather than substantial or essential components for humans. As a result one should not discriminate, marginalize or belittle other fellow human person merely due to these accidental features. Being a member of a particular ethnic group or religious affiliation should not be a criterion to determine one group people as human and the others not.

#### 4.6. Philosophy and Toleration

Toleration is one of the fundamental principles of coexistence. It is the virtue that lays foundation of peaceful coexistence in diversified communities like Ethiopia. As we know from the history of humanity intolerance among people resulted in many wars and conflicts. The central element of tolerance is respect of others' culture. One of the areas of conflict at present time is religion. Often we hear and read conflict of religion. But a critical question that one has to raise related with religious conflicts is that why there was/is such conflicts among religious persons? Are such conflicts avoidable? As I realized one of the factors of conflict is that people's failure to appreciate and respect the religious views of others. Another reason is lack of wonder about the religious practices of others. When you begin to wonder, you start to think about it and you may get certain meaning and lesson to yourself which may help you to lead a good and happy life in this world.

Philosophy advocates toleration of different points of views. A philosophy student is not ignorant to ideas that are held by others. He/she does not blindly reject or accept others view. Rather engages in critical examination to accept or refute a view. Refutation does not mean blind criticism and disrespect of others viewpoints but providing a rational critique while appreciating the assertion held by others. In this regard, a student who has at least exposure to introductory lessons of philosophy is less biased and provincial to religious views as well as other matters. One of the reasons is that students develop the habit of toleration through philosophical arguments which are rooted in various fields. In other words, exposure to different philosophical thoughts of several philosophers may help them to appreciate the views held by them.

Nevertheless, toleration does not imply blind acceptance and obedience to any views, authorities and practices, be it traditional, religious or political. It is a disposition which promotes respectful inquiry and critical reflection on the commands of these authorities.

Currently fundamentalism, either in secular or religious life, is a great threat to the survival of human beings. We often hear or read the loss of human life due to fundamentalist attitude and actions. In my view killing a human person due to not believing or accepting the religious view of another is unjust. For instance, few months ago the ISS murdering of Ethiopians in Tunisia is inhuman and morally objectionable. Affiliation to a particular religion should not be criteria to regard one as human or nonhuman. As I have discussed in the previous section, religion is one of the accidental features, not essential attribute, to distinguish a particular human being from his/ her own species. We human beings are one and the same whatever our religious affiliation is. Whether we are Christians, Jews, Muslims or Hindus we are one because we are creation of a creator. To put in a different words, humans share the same nature i.e. rationality as many philosophers agree. So why murder or inhuman treatment and injustice due to mere difference in religion?

Philosophy, as an instrument of critical examination of all values and worldviews, is an antidote for such fundamentalist attitudes, for philosophy urges one to critically question and examine the principles and values held by a given religion whether practicing these values and principles may violate the interest and welfare of other fellow humans. And a moral decision is a practice of engaging in critical thinking again and again over a moral issue before doing a certain action. Thus, a little dosage of philosophical training may allow one to examine well his/her religious principles and practices, for the unexamined religious principles and values are not worth practicing and living. When obedience to a religious practice inflicts harm on other fellow human beings, a critical and reflective person challenges, and questions and resists not practicing them. Such a person does not obey blindly the principles of religious authorities but challenges in a rational way and points out an alternative path which could lead to harmonious and peaceful living of all humans.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

To sum up, I strongly believe that a little dosage of philosophical training is an imperative to students of higher education to implement the current policies and direction of Ethiopian government which emphasizes training and education in science fields by enrolling 70% of students that join preparatory program and higher education. One of the main argument for a call for curriculum review is that training and educating students in natural science fields can yield little success unless backed up with philosophical attitudes and skills, for scientific investigations needs systematic approach to studying phenomena acquiring knowledge, critical observation, careful experimentation and collection of data. As asserted by Ndubisi,

It takes only a reflective mind to generate ideas, and it also takes a reflective mind to actualize these ideas. Philosophy has to do with creativity... We need philosophy to sharpen our creative mind for the purpose of economic growth and development... It is clear that all developed economies of the world have basic philosophical foundation [2].

The second argument is teaching philosophy in general and specific fields of philosophy such as logic, for example, can play vital role in the acquisition of attitudes and skills that are fundamental to do science. Without developing the habit of critical inquiry and critical thinking, it is undoubtedly questionable to engage in scientific investigation which may help us to meet societal needs. If a student is not equipped with such qualities, he/she has no gut to question, examine, and analyze the issues of this planet. Besides this, philosophical dispositions can allow students to observe critically phenomena and resolve current social problems.

Hence, in my view, it is difficult to solve various problems of the country by deemphasizing and overlooking the values of philosophy. Students of higher education need to be trained in philosophical skills and attitudes so as to lead the country in the path of development. I think we should not

fear philosophy rather we have to cherish it and cultivate in the mind of citizens in order to sift what is good for the development of the country.

Above all, the need of critical thinking and rational discourse on various issues is mandatory in such a globalized world in general and in Ethiopia in particular in order to resolve socio-economic, political, religious or ethnic problems that can impede development. In fact a rational dialogue and discussion which may enlighten the mind of citizens is an antidote multifaceted problems of society. Such a critical attitude and reflection over their existence may allow citizens to distinguish what is important from the trivial, rational from the irrational and good from bad. And through philosophical training citizens can easily eradicate the vestiges of prejudice, ignorance, arrogant dogmatism, irrationality and superstitious beliefs held for generations and many unethical and biased attitudes towards other human persons that could challenge the coexistence of nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia.

Moreover, philosophical attitudes and skills can equip the students with rational observation and analysis of data rooted in various cultures and traditions of Ethiopia.

Lastly, in the short term students of higher institutions of Ethiopia, can do little science without philosophy but in the long term, universities will become unproductive if it turns back to philosophical training and ignores the cherished values of philosophy.

All in all, I forward a clarion call to action and an urgent curriculum review in the higher learning institutions of Ethiopia just stating Nussbaum's persuasive argument in the need of humanities and arts to produce critical citizens.

If we do not insist on the crucial importance of the humanities and the arts, they will drop away, because they do not make money. They only do what is more much precious than that, make a world that is worth living in, people who are able to see other human beings as full people, with thoughts and feelings of their own that deserve respect and empathy, and nations that are able to overcome fear and suspicion in favour of sympathetic and reasonable debate [21].

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