A GUIDE TO PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

Diana-Abasi Ibanga, Ph.D

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PHILOSOPHICAL
RESEARCH

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DEDICATION

For Prof. Zana Akpagu, who believed in me and graciously facilitated my joining of the faculty of the University of Calabar. I remain forever grateful to you.

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PREFACE

There is continuous search for method of doing philosophy globally. The search for philosophical method is significant for two reasons: one, philosophical method is an integral part of the philosophical tradition inventing it, and two, (deriving from the first) every philosophical method is itself limited by its very conception. Since philosophy always works towards overcoming any bias that limits it, the continuous search for method become very important to philosophers globally. Moreover, method of doing philosophy is of crucial concern to students of philosophy in all traditions because the quality of epistemological output of philosophical inquiry depends largely on the method employed to conduct the inquiry. For example, an analytic method in its pure format will always produce analytic philosophy. This means that methodology does not only validates a philosophy but it gives identity to a philosophy – for it is by method a philosophy is determined as either X or Y. Godwin Azenabor (2002) maintains this line of thought that it is method – that is, how we investigate, formulate and present ideas – that validates a philosophical research as analytic, phenomenological, conversational, etc.

K. C. Anyanwu has argued that the claim that methodology is crucial to doing philosophy is not necessarily the case. According to him, "philosophical insight and creative vision do not depend on methods but on several factors like personal sensitivity and commitment to certain problems of experience" (Anyanwu 2000, 63). Furthermore, what is significant in philosophical research is problem formulation and having "definite knowledge of the basic assumptions, concepts, models, theories and worldview of the beliefs, judgments and values [we] claim to be analysing and criticizing" (Ibid.). He argues that methodology would not save the philosopher from errors and invalid conclusions if he/she neglects to properly

formulate the problem at task. Moreover, "it is the subject-matter that determines its own method" (Ibid.). This means that there is no pre-arranged method for any philosophical engagement ahead of the actual philosophizing; for the problem would provide its own methods of engagement. What this seems to mean is that the method for solving a given problem is inherent in the very nature of the problem. That is to say, the problem itself holds the clue to its solution. However, to understand the methods or the problem-solving clues that a given problem offers, the problem itself must be appropriately and adequately understood, and properly formulated. Azenabor has disputed Anyanwu's claim and maintains that methodology is indispensable to doing philosophy. According to him, "what eludes Anyanwu is that in formulating a problem, a particular methodology would eventually be used in analyzing or in solving the problem; so we cannot really run away from the question of methodology" (Azenabor 2002, 93).

I agree with Azenabor that methodology is fundamentally important to analyzing any philosophy but that will apply to the extent that the philosopher is merely analyzing and criticizing some raw data already given. Methodology is equally important to enable another philosopher to understand, test and evaluate the validity of a given philosophical output within the axiomatic system of that philosophy. However, there is merit in Anyanwu's claim that one does not really need a method for every philosophical engagement. But one must equally note that not every philosophical enterprise can be classified as a philosophical research. Anyanwu seems to have misunderstood the notion of method, for in renouncing method he failed to understand that academic philosophy – which is mainly criticism of existing philosophy – is basically research driven. Research implies method/procedure. Indeed, as Azenabor asserts, in doing academic philosophy the philosopher needs a method.

Problem formulation and "definite knowledge of the basic assumptions, concepts, models, theories and worldview of the beliefs, judgments and values" that Anyanwu identified as significant determinant of philosophical research are the constitutive elements of any philosophical research method. Without good problem formulation and "knowledge of the basic assumptions, concepts, models, theories and worldviews" of the subject-matter of the research, one cannot successfully undertake a research programme. To enable good problem formulation and understanding of the subject-matter (basic assumptions, concepts, models, theories and worldviews), the researcher requires systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of philosophical data. The researcher needs to clearly state the sources as well as procedure for collection, analysis and interpretation of the data to enable the work to be evaluated for its philosophic merits. Without these methodological inputs, any work would pass as a philosophical research. Akinpelu (2012) argues that if there was no philosophical research methodology there would not have been a philosophy because without it a researcher would not been able to research for philosophical knowledge and having found it would not have been able to validate it as such. The method one uses to do philosophical research definitely affects the quality of findings and its general output. The problems in a given philosophy can therefore be traced to the methods employed. The realization of this fact has pushed philosophers to continue to search for a robust method of doing philosophy.

This book born out of observation of poorly designed research method in most philosophical research done by undergraduate and graduate students. Most of the research designs used by the students are both inadequate and unsuitable for philosophical research they claimed to conduct. The aim of this book is to show the proper ways by which research method can be designed to guide a philosophical research. The book

highlights some philosophical research methods and further shows how they can be modelled into research design by researchers. It also highlights and explains some technicalities and mechanics of philosophical research. I do not presume that the issues discussed in this book are exhaustive. This book is specifically designed for students who are preparing to undertake research work in philosophy. It is my hope that students and academics alike shall derive maximum benefits from this book in terms of turning out philosophical research works that compare favourably with works in other parts of the world.

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January 1, 2020.

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