

Ugandans Called to Embrace Human Values and Ethics in this Technological Era

Makerere University Department of Philosophy on 16th November 2023 celebrated the world Philosophy Day with a call on the public to recognise the values of philosophy and the role it plays in human development.

The call was made by the Deputy Director, in charge of Administration and Graduate Training at Makerere University Assoc. Prod. Julius Kikooma while representing the University Vice Chancellor.

The World Philosophy Day is a global celebration that promotes the value of philosophical thinking and encourages discussions on various philosophical topics. This year, Makerere University celebrated the day under the theme “The Ethics of the Human of the Future.” The theme probed into the ethical considerations that arise with the rapid advancement of technology, biotechnology, and the potential transformation of human existence.

“Philosophy is the foundation of knowledge. When the humanity is faced with hard questions, the world looks to the philosophers to make sense out of the situation,” Prof. Kikooma said.

Kikooma also proposed the introduction of Philosophy as across cutting course in all Ugandan universities especially undergraduate programmes noting that the human of the future is in danger.

Representing the Principal College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Dean School of Liberal and Performing Arts Dr. Pamela Khanakwa noted that whereas advances of in Science and Technology present opportunities for continuous improvement in the human condition, they at the same time pose significant threats to human values.

In their endeavours, Dr. Khanakwa said, scientists usually focus on possibilities and methods actualities by focussing on the questions of ‘what’ and ‘how’, leaving the questions of ‘whether/ the ought’ and ‘why’.

“The latter questions imply concerns about the potential unintended negative impact of advancements on humanity and social values. This is the background to a number a number of international declarations such as the 2005, The Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights; The Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, among others”, Dr. Khanakwa explained

Noting that there still remain limited dialogue and awareness on matters of humanity and social values in Uganda, Dr. Khanakwa explained that this year’s celebration aimed at providing a concentrated and impactful exploration of the ethical challenges posed by advancements in science technology.

Speaking at the same event, the head Department of Philosophy Dr. John Barugahare said the event aimed at deepening understanding of ethical issues posed by advancements in biosciences and biotechnologies, and artificial intelligence, and their potential impact on the future of humanity.

“Besides promoting interdisciplinary and inclusive dialogue through open discussions among philosophers, ethicists, scientists, policy makers, and the general public to exchange viewpoints and insights on the ethical challenges ahead, we also wanted to raise ethical awareness about the need for thoughtful ethical assessment in the development and application of new technologies and human enhancements”, Dr. Barugahare added

Delivering the Keynote address on *Advances in Science and Technology, and ethics compliance: Managing the promises and perils of genetic engineering in Uganda*. Dr. Giregon Olupot, Makerere University College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, underscored the need for the public to protect the soil on grounds that humans came from soil, derive livelihood from soil and will end up in soil.

“The wellbeing of our environment, plants and animals, water, air among others are important in order to create a better world for all humanity. Philosophy, in its own world of science and it is an embodiment of all science. What is our thinking of the person of today vis a vis the person of tomorrow. The person in the present is the real person whose future is threatened and he is the one we should be concerned about”, He stressed.

The celebrations were also marked by a paper presentation by Dr. Ferdinand Mutaawe Kasozi & Rev. Fr. Akena on *Artificial Intelligence, Human values and the human of the future* and another presentation by Dr. Jimmy Spire Ssentongo on *Social Media transforming human relations*.

During the discussions, Prof. Edward Wamala from the Department of Philosophy encouraged the public to reflect on the human beings of the future saying, the advancement in science and technology has caused problems regarding moral values and human identity.

Besides advantages that come with science and technology, participants were challenged to reflect on ethical, moral and other concerns that come with technology advances such as surrogacy, plastic surgery, plant and animal genetic engineering, AI such as ChatGPT in academic institutions and its impact intellectual growth among the youth, social media content creators and addiction and effects on identity and relationships, as well as quality of information among others.

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