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**Universalism, Relativism,
and
Intercultural Philosophy**
Nigerian Philosophical Studies IV

Edited by
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Anthony C. Ajah

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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Preface

JOSEPH C.A. AGBAKOBA

The book *Universalism, Relativism, and Intercultural Philosophy* is the product of a conference that took place at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, in 2010, under the auspices of the Department of Philosophy and Classics of the University and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, Washington, DC, and with the collaborative support of the Committee on Intercultural Philosophy of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP) chaired by Professor William Sweet. Participants came from Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and North America.

The book approaches the issues around intercultural philosophy in relation to universalism and relativism from different angles, as well as the meaning and methodological issues relating to intercultural philosophy as such.

It is true that philosophy is deeply cultural and, consequently, to a large degree, it cannot be isolated from the cultural and historical context in which it develops. Nevertheless, there can be diverse attitudes to outside cultures and to how elements of such cultures might be integrated into one's own culture. This is apart from claims that there are structures of thought, as well as logical and factual claims, that have universal or near universal validity. So, it is very important that one has the appropriate disposition towards other cultures.

If one adopts a nativist and 'centrist' attitude to other cultures, for instance, one diminishes the possibility of broadening one's vision and cultural horizon enormously, if not entirely. In addition, one runs the risk of engaging not only in romanticism but also in undue scholarly protectionism, which might become so excessive as to lead to a deliberate preference for falsity, fallacy and muddle, in order to achieve rhetorical success (in preference to veridical successes in the form of truth and verisimilitude) – this is the problem of errant scholarly protectionism or 'erranticism.'

It is proper, then, that people reach out to understand other cultures with the purpose of enlarging their own philosophical perspective and cultural vision. While some of these ways may not be as helpful as others given the above goals of intercultural

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philosophy, there are nevertheless many ways of pursuing the intercultural vision.

Introduction

MATTHEW C. CHUKWUELOBE & ANTHONY C. AJAH

The Origins

The papers in this volume were selected from a series of papers delivered at a Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (CRVP) Conference held February 3rd-5th, 2010, at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The Conference was organized by the Council's Co-ordinator for Africa (Prof. Joseph C. A. Agbakoba), in collaboration with the Department of Classics, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and was hosted by Prof. Raymond Osei. The title of this volume reflects the theme of the conference which was on *Universalism, Relativism, and Intercultural Philosophy*. Why this theme?

The theme was chosen to create an opportunity for scholars from different fields in the humanities and social sciences to come together to reflect on one of the major issues that face humanity in the 21st century. One of the best known titles that have captured the particular issue in question is Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. After his *Clash of Civilizations* – which led to several reactions in the form of scholarly papers and books – Huntington remained so concerned that he worked with Lawrence Harrison in editing another volume titled *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (2000), arguing in the foreword to that volume that “Cultures Count.”¹ *Culture Matters* made an argument about the role of cultures in understanding and/or explaining the gap between developed, developing, underdeveloped, and failing (or failed) nations. Instead of looking at the question of development from the point of view of the unequal relationship between the core and peripheral states (Dependency Theory), authors like Samuel Huntington, Lawrence Harrison, David Landes, and Jared Diamond² are convinced that the differences in the rate of development of societies can be explained by a proper analysis of the differences within cultures of the societies that are

¹ See the title of Samuel Huntington's Foreword to the volume (New York: Basic Books, 2000), xiii – xvi.

² See Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005).

involved. The question then is: can cultures interact on such a platform that they learn from each other, improve from such a learning process – prompting intercultural contacts to have less conflict, and be more fruitful and humane?

Many authors do not find this question to be relevant because for centuries Western hegemony has been tested, confirmed, and consolidated. These authors argue therefore, that there is no reason to expect Western cultures to veer from their claims of superiority, which after all explains both the old and new arguments about universalization of truths, universalization of certain values, universalization of language, universalization of certain principles, and universalization of certain rights. Several African authors react to this position, because they think that the answer to Western hegemony is to accept the equality of all cultures and all ways of perceiving reality. Thus, they further argue that there should be no such thing as cross-cultural evaluation.³ Every culture is unique and self-sufficient (“period!”). And for this reason, what is called globalization is another form of cultural hegemony, neo-colonialism, slavery, and cultural destruction. Globalization – in the views of its critics – is another opportunity to further destroy the cultures of weaker nations. As would be expected, several African authors found this argument from a Nietzschean-Derridian-Lyotardian framework to be interesting. They argued strongly that all cultures should be treated as independent – so that African cultures would also be accepted on basis of this logic of self-sufficiency.

But, is it reasonable to hold that relativism is a useful – in fact the best – framework for 21st century societies? While relativism is consoling, because it gives value to once-battered identities, what are

³ This view is traced to Friedrich Nietzsche whose *Beyond Good and Evil* has been the foundation for what is regarded today as postmodernism – a position in philosophy and literary studies which argues that there are no universal values/truths, no intrinsic goodness or badness, no standard view, no single/best reading of a text, no single/best meaning of a text, no logocentric precedence. This view is represented by such authors as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, and so on. Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* and *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* were meant to express this view. In these texts, he disregards Jürgen Habermas’ confidence in the possibility of consensus and agreement. Also, Derrida’s *Margins of Philosophy, Of Grammatology, Positions (Interviews)*, among others, were also meant to sustain the above positions.

the possibilities of its validity? How possible is isolationism in the 21st century of collapsed boundaries and consistent intercultural encounters? As interesting and consoling as relativism may be, is it consistent with arguments about the equal humanity of all human beings and societies, bearing in mind that some cultures create more opportunities for improving social existence than others? Are all cultures equal and deserving equal treatment? Is cross-cultural evaluation of cultures tantamount to cultural hegemony? These are philosophical questions. They are questions that connect three aspects of a paradox:

1. the desire for universal treatment of all human beings as members of one family who can understand each other (and therefore are in a position to criticise or recommend what may be good for others),

2. the hatred for hegemony, a position which supports relativism and the unqualified respect for all peoples and all cultures, and

3. the need to address the 21st century reality that different cultural agents seem to have been *condemned* to continually meet and interact among themselves. That is, the 21st century has consolidated intercultural encounters.

So, what can philosophy do? What role can philosophy and philosophers play in addressing the above and so many other related questions?

Discussions on Some of the Major Issues

The questions above must in no small measure demonstrate to any attentive reader that there are issues resulting from the 21st century – that is, that people of different cultures have been condemned to interact, thanks to the framework created and consolidated by globalization and its structures. Some of these issues, which also guided the discussions during the 2010 CRVP conference in Cape Coast, include:

- Equality of Cultures
- Globalization and the Question of (changing, stable, and adjustable) Cultural Identity
- Enculturation and the Fear of Hegemony
- Cultural Ontology and Social Organization

- On the Possibilities of Cross-Cultural Communication
- On the role of language in Intercultural Communication
- Philosophy and the principles for Intercultural Encounters
- Hermeneutics: as the role of philosophy, and as a principle of inter-cultural encounters

The central issues in Intercultural Philosophy therefore centre on the need to outline the principles that make intercultural communication possible without re-creating new situations of subduing the cultures of economically weaker nations, yet, without upholding the monstrous option called relativism.

Equality of Cultures

Is it still valid, as was the case during the era of slavery and colonialism, to hold that some cultures are simply inferior to others? This is one of the primary questions that confront any person who has interest in intercultural interaction. The idea of the 'White Man's Burden' to civilize was rooted in the conviction that the White Man's culture (civilization) is superior to the culture and civilization of all other human societies. Those centuries of ignorance and dehumanization have come and long gone. How do we now answer the question concerning the equality of cultures – if not the question of the inferiority and/or superiority of some cultures in relation to others? To learn from another culture – and acknowledge having done that – does this imply in any way that the culture from which one has learnt is superior to the culture of the person who learnt from that culture? To criticise what is obtainable in another culture, does it in any way contradict the argument for the equality of cultures? Does equality strictly imply the *false* claim of self-sufficiency? These nagging questions are those involved in the issue of equality of cultures as it relates to the focus of intercultural philosophy. It should not be forgotten that there are extreme positions with regard to cultural identities, and possibilities of dialogues. Some authors do not consider what might be regarded as 'more useful attitudes' in the face of globalization and the 21st spread of intercultural encounters. Instead, they insist that cultures should be respected (simple!). There is no need for whatever may be called intercultural dialogue! There is no fair ground for any such fair dialogue!

*Globalization and the Question of (changing, stable, and adjustable)
Cultural Identity⁴*

The 21st century version of globalization not only created a very significant awareness of the various cultures and peoples in our world, but it also led to the need for each cultural unit to insist on determination of its identity. In this respect, one can understand the efforts of several nationalist and post-independence African authors and philosophers to define and sustain an African identity. For some, due to the ill and dehumanizing experiences of slavery and colonialism, there is need to insist that the identity of the African is different, unique, incommunicable, unchanging, and better than the identity and culture of the West – as if the West has a single culture. For these authors, no matter what promises may cloud the true intentions of the globalization process, the real intention is to once more subjugate the African and destroy his/her cultural identity. To avoid this, it is important to insist that the identity of Africa is unique and provides an apt home that one can always be returned to in destitute time. For some, no matter the difficulties that arise from Africa's experience of globalization, it is to be accepted that there is no single, pristine, and unchanging identity – nay, unchanging African identity.⁵ This is one of the issues that engage any philosopher interested in intercultural philosophy. At the first instance, he confronts the reality of the plurality of cultures (multiculturalism). He in turn makes invaluable recommendations as to what a more useful attitude of the African should be from the perspective of globalization and its concerns.

⁴ Izu Marcel Onyeocha had done a work titled *Africa – The Question of Identity; A Philosophical Reflection on Africa* [Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (Nigerian Edition), 1997]. Anthony K. Appiah's *In My Father's House* was meant also to address the same identity question. In the same volume, Appiah makes detailed reference to an interview he granted to Chinua Achebe in which the latter made his submissions with regard to what the identity of the African should mean for the contemporary African.

⁵ While Anthony K. Appiah, Izu Marcel Onyeocha, and Chinua Achebe clearly take up this position, some other authors still argue for the reality of a pristine African identity.

Enculturation and the Fear of Hegemony

In the views of authors such as Vincent Shen, enculturation is a possible watchword for intercultural dialogue. In fact, enculturation is conceived of as the best principle to guide intercultural encounters. Where this is adopted as a principle for intercultural communication, hegemony fails because each of the cultural agents in the interactive process interacts to enrich and be enriched, instead of interacting to subdue (which is the primary aim of a *hegemon*). The logic of this is: the acceptance of one (enculturation or hegemony) destroys the other. There is no logic of 'both...and...' between enculturation and hegemony. What is possible between the two is the choice of one, which necessarily implies the death of the other ('either...or...').

Cultural Ontology and Social Organization

If enculturation is chosen, then, there will be room to compare cultural ontologies and their implications both on the organization of different societies, and the impacts of the conceptions of organization on the concept of power, leadership, citizenship, and social development. This is an area where the social philosopher whose interest is merely intercultural philosophy believes that a mutual communication among cultures can gradually lead to some adjustments in the conception of being (ontology) of different cultures. Since ontology influences the organization of life in the society that it accepts, any adjustment in the ontology is meant also to affect the organization of such society. Thus, intercultural philosophy considers the possibilities of making recommendations for changes both in the ontology of some cultures, and in the organization of any such society which adjusts its ontology.

On the Possibilities of Cross-Cultural Communication

The above statement already presupposes the possibility of cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural evaluation, and mutual correction of cultures by those "from the outside." Ultimately, it has to be borne in mind that to brand the other as an "outsider" implies also a destruction of the argument for a universal humanity. If the 'other' is so much an outsider that he cannot (!) understand my culture, then, we are not of the same species. One recalls Thomas Nagel's argument in his classic paper "What is it like to be a Bat?" He rightly argued that whatever human beings can know about the

bat is reduced to knowledge of the general physical features of the bat. Thus, any attempt to undermine the basis on which cross-cultural communication is grounded – and thereby describe the ‘other’ as one incapable of understanding my culture so well enough that he/she can offer some evaluation with regard to my culture – is to subtly insist that we are not of the same species. If we are of the same species, then there should be enough grounds for mutual communication among cultural groups. If we are not of the same species, why do we complain of hegemony and superiority?

On the Role of Language in Intercultural Communication

If we are one species, is there any need to have/speak the same language – a universal language? If we are the same species with a class of similar problems, do our different languages contribute anything unique in our reflections about these peculiar problems? What is the role of language in intercultural communication? What is also the extent of the possibility of successful translation of our different cultural practices and reflections (which are always expressed in languages) such that the details of these practices and reflections can be made accessible to ‘the outsider’? If cultures are passed on through language, and there are so many languages as there are so many cultures, what are the chances of a successful translation to such an extent that an outsider can so easily understand another culture as to be ‘qualified’ to communicate with it, assess it, evaluate it, or learn from it? This is where intercultural philosophy focuses on language and its role(s) in intercultural communication.

On Philosophy with an Intercultural Frame and Focus

It has been argued for a long time and by so many – Hegel, Kant, Heidegger, Gadamer, Okere, Ricoeur, Hountondji, and Wiredu – that philosophy is culture-structured and -coloured. Thus, every philosophy originates from specific issues of concern to those who philosophise from within that culture. But, can there really be a philosophy that is intercultural? If every philosophy originates from a particular culture, is it a contradiction (as Marietta Stepanyants argues in Chapter 7 of this volume) to think of a philosophy that is intercultural? Are there philosophical questions that replicate themselves in every culture? Has it been settled that Western

Philosophy is not the only philosophy? If yes, does that mean that there are as many logics as there are many philosophies? Is there a universal framework for human thought-processes (logic) or must Africans (for instance) establish an African system of thought-process (African logic) to enable her to prove she has a philosophy? What features of the practice of philosophy in Africa make it possible to engage in intercultural encounters/reflections? Can a philosopher, who insists on the uniqueness of African cultures and identities, engage meaningfully in intercultural philosophy? What can African philosophy contribute in the area of intercultural philosophy? These are the issues that define the whole idea of giving philosophy an intercultural framework and focus.

Hermeneutics: as the Role of Philosophy, and as a Principle of Inter-cultural Encounters

As a cultural agent, the 'other' person has always been seen as an outsider in relation to 'my' culture. He should, without much ado, accept that there are several things about me and my culture which are hidden from him or inaccessible to him, if I do not assist him. Unless these hidden elements, features, and meanings of my culture are 'revealed' to him, he should admit that he knows only too little about me. For this reason, several 19/20th century philosophers gave so much attention to hermeneutics as the act of "interpreting with a view to 'revealing' what is otherwise hidden." Freud's psychoanalysis was a breakthrough, precisely because of this. Schleiermacher and Dilthey were occupied with this; so also were Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and so many others. The post-independence response to the question of intercultural communication, and the debate about the existence of African philosophy saw a return to the role of hermeneutics in both the understanding of cultural agents and intercultural interaction.

Some authors have argued that, since philosophy is a critical reflection on human existence, and that this reflection is meant to lead to the revelation of some hidden facts about human existence, therefore, philosophy should be re-conceptualized to mean simply interpretation. Following from this, Theophilus Okere defined African Philosophy from a hermeneutic point of view. Others, however, based on the above, see hermeneutics as a very important principle in intercultural encounter and intercultural philosophy.

The argument is that it is only when the details of my culture are revealed to 'the other' by means of interpretation that he can be in a good position to understand my culture, and thus be able to interact with me on a better platform.

Thematic Presentations

The above issues are related. They are exciting. They demand attention. Yet, whatever attention they stimulate from individual authors, one would be most reasonable to expect that the direction taken by one author would be different from that of another. This is evident in the choice of issues by the authors of the 13 papers that make up this volume and, it is also evident in the direction which is taken with respect to these issues.

For instance, a greater percentage of contemporary authors would, in comparing cultures, argue that "openness" on the part of each culture is important in intercultural relations because "nobody has it all." This is based on the presupposition that the equality of all human beings does not necessarily imply the equality (in the sense of the extent to which each of such practices enhance the wellbeing of the greater number) of all cultural practices. Those who hold this view would argue that in *every truly* human culture, there are always needs, from time to time, for changes. But, Jabrail Yusuf and Hashir Abdulsalam are outside this percentage: they argue otherwise. In their paper titled "Time, Knowledge, and the Clash of Civilization: An Islamic Approach," they hold that "Islamic knowledge is all encompassing, that is, it pervades through time and space without any limitation of sight. This contrasts with human wisdom which is myopic and short-sighted in its vision." Islamic knowledge is applicable "to all time and space." If statements like these led Samuel Huntington to argue in his *Clash of Civilizations* that "the Islamic civilization will be the most violent civilization and the primary threat to the West in the post-Cold War era," Yusuf and Abdulsalam thought Huntington's was a "controversial statement." If Huntington thought Islam is exclusivist, Yusuf and Abdulsalam thought that Islam is not only homogeneous but also the most diverse entity ever known in humanity. It is not merely a religion. "It is also a code of life and a culture, and, as such and most importantly, a political ideology, which is universal and inescapable in its socio-cultural effort. It pervades every aspect of social

cooperation and culture and this makes it impregnable and organized in its approach to every aspect of human culture irrespective of environment...Muslims have built a myriad of inclusivist civilizations in which non-Muslims have enjoyed a great level of autonomy both in terms of religion and law...In fact Islam has condemned compulsion in matters of religion."

Yusuf and Abdulsalam hold that there is a "fair ground for the declaration of *jihad*" or "a sufficient reason for *jihad*." If, as they hold, it is the case that "Islam and its wisdom are universal and applicable to all cultural surroundings irrespective of time," then, they seem also to be of the opinion that Islam "knows it all" and therefore has no need to dialogue in order to enrich itself from any other culture. If there should be any enrichment, it should be only one way: from Islam to other cultures. Dorothy Olu-Jacob (in Chapter 3 of this collection) and Benjamin Ewelu (in Chapter 9) would disagree with this. Anthony Ajah's arguments (see Chapter 12) are also quite opposed to such a position. And, if African philosophy is to grow, as Evaristus Ekweke thinks, it should not take this route also (see Chapter 13).

Uduma Oji Uduma is interested in the growth of African Philosophy. In his paper captioned "Between Universalism and Cultural Identity: Revisiting the Motivation for an African Logic," he agrees with Olu-Jacob (see Chapter 3) that intercultural philosophy is a 21st century need. Beyond this, he clarifies the weaknesses inherent in what Olu-Jacob terms the 'ethnocentric approach'. His focus on this part of the problem is traced to the question of the existence or non-existence of African philosophy. This question has led some African authors to argue thus: "if logic is part of philosophy and philosophy is culture bound, it follows necessarily that logic is culture bound." Thus, they argue, there must be an African logic.

To drive his point home, Uduma agreed that "The motivation for cultural identity is often tailored down to imply a repudiation of universalism." More than this, and more specific to the issues he was out to address in the paper, Uduma noted that while "the motivation for a peculiar African (regional) logic" is traced to the first motivation about cultural identity against excessive and arrogant universalism, there is "the need to transcend jingoism in the advocacy for an African logic." Such jingoism is tantamount to "the repudiation of universal thought (logical) processes." In his view,

“there is a real need to rise above the identity problem and come to the realization that logic is universal, that there is no cultural or regional logic; the call for African logic is thus only contentious.” This is important because, “to argue for a peculiar African logic is to unwittingly argue – and this would be monstrous – that Africa has a different or peculiar system or systems of thought from the rest of the world.” Is this what intercultural philosophy means for Africa and African Philosophers? Does an insistence on a peculiar African logic (and spending mental energies on proving the existence of same) not constitute a distraction from the burning issues of development that demand the attention of the African philosopher?

These questions, added to two other questions – (a) “Is the claim to possess universally valid truths and values not the reason for the centuries of Africa’s experiences of slavery and colonialism?” and (b) “Is the claim to have universally valid truths and values not at the foundation for what is today regarded by Josephat Oguejiofor and Dorothy Olu-Jacob as Africa’s predicament?” – occupies Olu-Jacob in this volume. In her paper titled: “Intercultural Philosophy, Africa’s Predicament and Globalization: Finding the Missing Link,” Olu-Jacob tries to establish some connections among slavery, colonialism, globalization, Africa’s predicament, and Intercultural philosophy.

According to Olu-Jacob, while globalization is no longer an issue, what is an issue is an existing paradox: the clash between cultural identity and cultural diversity. She sees African philosophers as having numerous stakes in the resolution of this paradox – especially as it pertains to contemporary Africa. The diversity is so much, and so evident. Like Anthony Ajah in Chapter 12 of this volume, Olu-Jacob is convinced that the degree of interaction among these diverse cultures is great and unavoidable, and each of the cultural agents is left with one solution – to relate. But, they must relate while respecting certain rules of inter-relationship. Olu-Jacob argues very strongly therefore that: “In the light of the interdependence and intensification of inter-relations within the globe, no culture, African or non-African can remain shut up in its cocoon or operate as a windowless monad because the globalizing dynamics call for mutual complementarity and enrichment...Within the universalizing phenomenon of

globalization, Africa can find its missing link through interculturality.”

To answer the question, “how can this been done, and who can realize this?” Olu-Jacob holds that this can be realized by African philosophers. It also requires a consistent analysis of other cultures by this same group. She argues this because, if African philosophers can “reflect and interpret other cultures,” they will be in advantaged positions to know “what has enabled other cultures to excel in order to transform the African condition.”

This is possible, if our author made reference to the need for self-examination and dialogue among cultures on the basis of equality rather than domination. In her view, dialogue is essential for the simple reason that it “involves the unity of action and reflection of the interlocutors for the purpose of transforming and humanizing the world.” This transformation and humanization of the world is possible, if and only if, such a dialogue is characterized by humility, and “no party in the dialogue should consider itself as the owner of truth or be closed or offended by the contribution of others. Clearly, self-sufficiency is incompatible with” this type of transforming and humanizing dialogue. Olu-Jacob appropriates Freire’s position that in such a humanizing dialogue, “What we have are individuals who are attempting together to learn more than they now know.”

Olu-Jacob is very hopeful: if this type of dialogue is transforming and humanizing, it can gradually lead Africa out of her predicaments. Thus, intercultural philosophy can learn several things from several other cultures with regard to how they take care of such tormenting issues as: peace and security, poverty, corruption, colonialism, and so on. Olu-Jacob strongly holds that this will be possible if African philosophers jettison both the ethnocentric (which means our way is the best) and parochial (which means our way is the only way) approaches to getting African states out of their predicaments. Instead, Olu-Jacob recommends “the synergetic approach, which...offers the opportunity for cooperation and complementarity that is mutually enriching and enables Africa to find its missing links.”

It should not be forgotten, however, that the search for such links need not, and in fact should not, ignore the determining impact of ontologies on what is borrowed into a society, and on social organization. If a missing link is locatable in another culture, then,

inculturation becomes an issue that demands attention. And, if inculturation leads to borrowing some ideas from one culture into another, then, the 21st century practice of (the Western model of) democracy in African states is an example of inculturation. But, according to some authors, the 'foreign' stem called 'liberal democracy' has not been properly grafted into the ontology of majority of African states. In fact, some think that 'liberal democracy' is simply incompatible with African Ontology. Joseph Agbo holds this idea. This was why he chose "The Ontological Basis for the Failure of Liberal Democracy in Africa: A Phenomenological Rescue" as the title of his paper. He is convinced that: "the obvious failure of the liberal democratic alternative in Africa should not be sought in Politics but in Ontology...[t]he abstract individualist ontology of liberal democracy does not fit into the social, other-directed worldview of African societies." With this position, one recalls the earlier presentation of the relationship between ontologies and social organization as one of the themes that have occupied some authors in their reflections about cultures and intercultural encounters. Agbo requests of liberal democracy to do two things if it must succeed in Africa. The first is to adopt the phenomenological attitude. The second is "to change the entities that make up its ontological world from 'individuals' to 'citizens'.

Agbo believes that the sense of citizenship entails a high level of commitment. And, the sense of commitment is what African citizens need in order to make development more realizable. But, they are not only citizens of their immediate countries; the 21st century has deepened the consciousness that they are also citizens of the world, conceived as a global village. In this village, multiculturalism is presented as the rule of co-existence.

To buttress this point, Alloy Ihuah finds it important to represent the idea of the place of women in Tiv societies of North-central Nigeria. In his paper titled "The Politics of Gender Power in Tiv Aesthetic Tradition: Liberation, Centering or Powerment," Ihuah expresses a conviction that "Among the Tiv of central Nigeria, the woman (as wife) is the heart-beat of the household, the measure of all things for the husband and the epicentre of the community. Contrary to the conclusion of the African Neo-cultural positivists, the roles of Tiv traditional social systems assigns to *kwase Tiv* (Tiv Woman) do not demean her and make her inferior. She is neither

marginalized nor oppressed and exploited in social, political, economic and religious spheres.”

This is a typical attempt, by means of intercultural philosophy, to express the possible differences in the modes of social organization between societies and cultures. In Ihuah’s views therefore, the question of marginalization is not an issue in Tiv societies as the issue is coloured and championed by several women from several other societies. France’s Simone de Beauvoir’s arguments for the liberation and emancipation of women, and several Non-Governmental Organizations which aim at making cases for the emancipation of women, are cases in point. The arguments captured in the deeply coated concept “feminism,” are, in the views of Ihuah, not really relevant for the Tiv Woman, for the Tiv societies, or for the philosopher from a Tiv society. He uses the arguments of Chinweizu in his *Anatomy of Female Power*, to drive his point home about the Tiv woman’s power and status.

Yet, Ihuah makes distinctions between “The Negative Tiv Woman” and “The Positive Tiv Woman.” This was meant to demarcate between the Tiv women who play the roles assigned to them (and thus command the respect indicated above), and those who are distracted from performing their roles (and are therefore not accorded that respect). This does not mean that Ihuah was subscribing to a form of relativist perception of ‘the woman’, her roles in the society, and the respect due to her for her performance of these roles. The universals remain: the woman is the woman no matter in what culture she may be found.

The question on “what are universals?” was part of what caught Francis Isichei’s attention. The title of his paper reads: “Universalism and Relativism in Philosophy: Nature, Problems and Contemporary Significance.” Isichei moves from making a presentation of the four possible types of universalism (extreme realism, moderate realism, conceptualism, and nominalism) to also making a presentation of three forms of relativism (ethical, descriptive, and metaethical relativism). In Isichei’s views, relativism in all its forms, no doubt, has its problem of a self-contradictory and self-defeating character. The contemporary world must not be led to believe that there are no absolute and objective truth and values. The task is to continue to search for absolute truth and objective values, what they are, how they exist, and how we can know them better. It is clear that we are

still far from having the answers to those questions. On the basis of these, Isichei made a concluding submission regarding the relativist. He wrote: "What they want is that easy out, so as not to need to face the awesome task of justifying or discovering the true nature of being and value."

Continuing from where Isichei stopped, Marietta Stepanyants, in her paper titled "Philosophy and Inculturation: The Context of Universalism," noted that "the history of philosophy will remain incomplete and one-sided (with a 'Western bias') so long as it ignores the fundamental universals of other cultures." Her reason for taking this position was because: "Even the universals and values recognized as common to all mankind are frequently imbued with basically different substance depending on context of relevant culture." With such emphasis on context, Stepanyants qualified globalization as a "monster". She noted that 'the very concept of "trans-cultural philosophy" is not only erroneous but self negating. There is nothing like inter-cultural philosophy, for every philosophy...is culture bound'.

Though culture bound, the practice of philosophy, especially in the post-colonial era, has always called for comparison – in the search for the possibilities of fruitful dialogues among cultures and philosophical systems. Thus, the practice of comparing the teaching and practice of African philosophy with that of Western philosophy comes up in African philosophy papers and texts. For this reason, Kwasi Wiredu once wrote about "How not to compare" the two philosophies. Martin Asiegbu, in Chapter 8 of this volume, chooses to compare, too. He is interested in the possibilities of dialogue between the teaching of African philosophical issues in departments of philosophy in Western universities, and the extent to which philosophical issues relating to the West are taught in African universities. He titles his paper: "Intercultural Philosophy: Toward an Adequate Cross-Cultural Dialogue between African Philosophy and Western Philosophy."

Asiegbu argues that there is poverty of attention to the programs of African philosophy in African universities. This is not to talk about the near non-existence of programs of African philosophy in Western universities. This is traced to the "paradigmatic position of Western philosophy [and] the neglect of African philosophy in...philosophical curriculum." Thus, Asiegbu concludes that the

dialogue between African and Western philosophies is “one-dimensional.” Besides, he argues, there are dimensions of African philosophy that are rich, unexplored, not accessed, and rarely (if at all) taught. The exploration of such themes in African philosophy, and their teaching is important and, they are necessary moves towards achieving a more balanced dialogue between African and Western philosophies. But more than just these, Asiegbu is convinced that: “To hold true, a cross cultural dialogue entails “mutual recognition and respect among cultures” according to which no one culture in particular claims “a priori superiority in point of rationality,” adopting a “commitment to dialogical equality,” and perceiving the Other as “co-subjects” in a cross cultural dialogue.

Language is the tool that makes dialogues possible. While Asiegbu describes the features of a balanced (two-dimensional) dialogue, Benjamin Ewelu reflects on the possible contributions of African languages in the discourses on intercultural philosophy. His paper title posed a question: “Intercultural Philosophy – A Quest for Unity in Diversity: What can African Languages Contribute?” Before he answers this, Ewelu submits that “Intercultural philosophy is a call for openness and tolerance to the other, for nobody has it all.” Intercultural philosophy encourages, persuades, and pursues something. It *encourages* each culture to contribute to the general world philosophy. It *persuades* each philosophy to accept other philosophies in order to enrich the general philosophy. In doing so, Ewelu was convinced that intercultural philosophy *pursues* unity without uniformity. It leads to a realization that the European philosophical pride that praises the European *Spirit* (Hegel and Heidegger) and the Japanese intellectual movement known as *nihonjinron* that upholds the uniqueness and the incommunicability of Japanese thought, are improper. Such an attitude upholds irrational pride, non-readiness to dialogue and intellectual dogmatism. For a more direct answer to the question he raised, Ewelu held that “for the philosophical riches of African cultures to be harnessed to its maximum, such riches were better forwarded in African languages, which are essential elements of African cultures.” This is because each culture will contribute more to the wealth of world philosophy, if it brings forward its own philosophy in its own language which is the essential element of the culture.

While Stepanyants emphasises inculturation, Isichei emphasises the contemporary significance of the Universalism versus Relativism debate, Asiegbu emphasises dialogue, and Ewelu draws attention to the possible contributions of African languages to intercultural philosophy, Edward Alam drew attention to something that is most likely to be forgotten: 'extremes'! He titles his paper: "Reflections on Intercultural Philosophy: Avoiding the Extremes." He begins by acknowledging the 'growing interest in intercultural or world philosophy'.

But then, like a jolt, he warns: "it occurs to me that philosophers, whether in India, Africa, or wherever they might be, ought to stay clear of two extremes." The one extreme is an exaggerated emphasis on uniqueness. The other extreme is to "so emphasize unity (and a corresponding monolithic monopoly of this unity) as to dismiss the important and complementary differences that are so enriching and necessary in the quest for wisdom." Where intercultural philosophy needs to pay attention, in the views of Alam, is on the possibility of "the unity of philosophical experience." This experience has a potential to transform by re-evaluating the categories of human relations in the 21st century. This philosophical experience, with the transformation that it brings will gradually draw our attention to the fact that integration can be enabled to "signify solidarity...rather than marginalization." Of course, the possibility of such solidarity, Alam rightly states, requires a discipline like philosophy because it requires drawing attention to that "transcendent dignity" of man. The successful relationship among human societies in the 21st century is highly dependent on this transcendence. This transcendence is the only frame, in Alam's view, for the possibilities of intercultural communication – philosophies and social interactions.

Reflecting on this possibility as it deals on texts, William Sweet writes on the problem of "Migrating Texts and Traditions in Intercultural Philosophy." Sweet begins by outlining some apparent instances of migrating texts and traditions – that is, instances where a philosophical text or tradition that has its origin in one time and place is apparently able to move or migrate to another time or place, to be understood, and even to grow and flourish. Some examples of this may be (Indian) Buddhist philosophy that migrated to China, Korea, and Japan (and, more recently, North America and Europe),

and the introduction of hermeneutics and post-modern thought into Asia. Sweet acknowledges that some scholars would challenge whether this phenomenon is genuine – i.e., they would deny that a text can be genuinely understood and have meaning outside of its context of origin. Sweet, then, responds to these challenges, by describing additional examples of ‘migration,’ such as the communication of western philosophy to China in the 17th century by Jesuit philosophers, and the movement of Upanisadic texts from their ‘home’ (in Sanskrit) into Persian. Examples such as these allow Sweet not only to address the challenges, but to explain better when and why texts and traditions migrate – and when and why they do not. In conclusion, Sweet argues, if texts and traditions can migrate, then there should be no obstacle to intercultural philosophy.

While some authors would simplistically describe globalization (which has increased the possibilities of more and more people, traditions, and texts to migrate from one location to another) as an “imperial trap of neo-colonialism” which African states are being “lured, cajoled and played into,” Anthony Ajah thought differently. Reflecting on the possibilities of intercultural communication (around the frame of transcendence indicated by Alam), and as it relates not only with texts (William Sweet) but also with social relations and communication, Ajah titles his paper: “Communicative Rationality and Cross-Cultural Communication.” He appreciates the fact that it appears there “can be no centre (universalism) for the many cultural appearances (multiculturalism and relativism).” He agrees with van Binsbergen that globalization has made the world in such a way that “the new home is nowhere, the new boundary is situational and constructed, the new identity is performative...the new other is...as a fellow world citizen.” In his view, globalization has become so complex that we cannot ‘back-off: we are inevitably in it’. Ajah agrees with Nayan Chanda and Thomas Friedman that: *The World is Flat* – as Friedman titled one of his texts. Yet, he thinks that with the clash of cultures and the clashy nature of intercultural encounters, the world is also not flat. In his view, this is a paradox. He refuses to accept that globalization can and is all-bad. Making use of the views of Jürgen Habermas as a theoretical framework, Ajah holds that globalization engages us in a very challenging game! And to survive, “Only one alternative is left for us: we must play the

game but (!) with the rules. The primary rule needs to be natural to us since the game is natural also to us.”

According to Ajah, instead of focusing on threatened identities, and worrying ourselves with the politics of recognition, we should consider Vincent Shen’s option of looking at globalization as an opportunity for the mutual enrichment of cultures by means of searching for more universalizable elements embodied in various expressions. This may sound difficult, but Ajah thinks that it is possible because, while we are worried about exclusions, we should realize that “We naturally have what it takes to keep including what is excluded.” This is both a fact and a disposition that makes cross-cultural communication really possible. This is because Habermas’ theory of communicative rationality offers a framework that “predisposes us to move from mere encountering to communicating.” Whereby communication is understood to mean ‘a form of giving such that the one who encounters, by acknowledging the validity of the “other” and his claims, simultaneously gives and accepts his identity.’

According to Evaristus Ekweke, hermeneutics is the (transcendent) principle that makes such intercultural encounter also feasible. He titles his paper “Intercultural Philosophy in Consultation with a Hermeneutic Approach to Natural Science: An African Perspective.” Ekweke singles out hermeneutics as the tool that can make intercultural philosophy possible and most fruitful. Leaning on Theophilus Okere’s submissions with regard to hermeneutics, Ekweke recalls an earlier conceptualization of hermeneutics as being concerned with interpretation: “It is also of the meaning of meaning itself. Hermeneutics enlists the services of explanation with the aim of shading sufficient light on the significance of a word or a proposition.” If intercultural is “a cross fertilization of cultures,” Ekweke argues that it cannot be successful without the consistent acts of shedding light on the unclear aspects of each of the cultures involved in the cross fertilization. And, as already indicated, this is what hermeneutics *is* – *this shading of more sufficient light*. This is what hermeneutics *does* – *the process of shading sufficient lights on unclear aspects of cultures*. Hermeneutics, Ekweke rightly holds, “involves bringing an inner meaning into the open...making explicit what is implicit.”

On the basis of the above nature and functions of hermeneutics, Ekweke argues that: "A situation arises, where a given culture has problems associating or encountering another culture. Hermeneutics with its characteristics of making crystal what is not yet explained would be of immense help." For this reason, Ekweke recommends that "in some aspects of intercultural relationships like philosophy and natural science, hermeneutics should be applied."⁶

⁶ The Editors are especially grateful to Dr Gail Presbey of the University of Detroit-Mercy, and to Dr William Sweet of St Francis Xavier University, for their work in proofreading and revising an earlier version of this manuscript.

Part I
On Equality of Cultures and
the Fear of Hegemony

1.

Time, Knowledge, and the Clash of Civilisations: An Islamic Approach¹

JIBRAIL BIN YUSUF & HASHIR A. ABDULSALAM

Time and Space in Philosophical Perspective

One ambiguity challenging mankind in its attempt to understand its own existence is the nature of time.² The awareness of death, the experience of youth and ageing, the irrevocability of the past and the unpredictability of the future, and even the planning of work, all involve time.³ The word “time” has various meanings and categories; there is, however, unity of time, but what justifies this unity can better be appreciated with a convoluted effort, which is not the purpose here. According to Plato, “Time is clearly posited as an

¹ *Abstract:* For Muslims, Islam is time-conscious and eternal, and its wisdom and rules, having emanated from on high, are constant but are, simultaneously, responsive to changing circumstances of every environment and culture or civilization. Its philosophies apply to all times and places while it establishes the moral guidelines for good behavior in all aspects of life on which legal rules can develop and it orders humans to regulate their activities in worldly life according to their time, conditions, and environmental backgrounds. Contrary to this, some people presume that the passage of time provides adequate ground for the need for new guidance. For them, a religion revealed fourteen centuries ago must have grown unfashionable and unsuitable to satisfy the needs of the new epoch, ameliorate the challenges of scientific knowledge, and augment the excitement of modern civilizations. This paper examines the Islamic perspective of time and the all-encompassing nature of its wisdom or knowledge (which is beyond the absolute restriction of time and space) and its approach to the clash of civilizations, and proves the limitedness of human knowledge and vision that do not penetrate into the spectra of the future or eminence. The theoretical framework is Huntington’s CoC theory. It argues that for Muslims, the clash between the Islamic nations and Western powers is not a struggle for cultural identity as postulated, but a result of the desire of the West to obstruct the establishment of values based on Islamic religious wisdom which is dearer to the Islamic nations than the West estimates.

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Western View of the Inner Experience of Time and the Limits of Thought,” in H. Agnessy, *Time and the Philosophies* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), p. 33.

³ *Ibid.*

objective measurable ordering of everything worldly.”⁴ For Aristotle, “Time is the number [numbered number, measure] of movement according to the before and after.”⁵ He, like the Mycenaean philosophers, among whom was Anaximander, posited that time was a medium or determinant of change.⁶ The cognition of time developed from a fundamental philosophical determination to comprehend the essential characteristic of the changing world to which humanity belongs and which is reflected in the body of modern knowledge.⁷ Time deals with the succession, progression, or the chain, or, better still, the sequence of events or their duration.⁸ It also connotes the mode of existence of man and his outside environment together with the development of the physical world.⁹ In the view of V.I. Lenin: “Recognizing the existence of objective reality, i.e. matter in motion, independently of our mind, materialism must also inevitably recognize the objective reality of time and space.”¹⁰ The two concepts, time and space are, therefore, always correlated. In other words, there can be no space without time and vice versa. Space does not occur on its own; rather, within it and time, man is able to classify the relation of point-instants to one another with that of persons to one another assured by each other’s mind.¹¹

In Islamic philosophy, the Arabic word *zamaan*, used for time, also means “era,” “an interval of time,” “period,” or “time space.” The Arabic word *aan*, which denotes a current time, “now,” can also mean a “season.” *Hiin* also indicates “a time-frame” or “an epoch” or “a fixed period of time,” while *waqt*, *mawqit* and *miiqaat*, all derived from the same root, indicate the specific time of a neighbourhood or a particular space of land or environmental setting. The *miiqaat*, whose plural form is *mawaaqiit*, suggests spatio-temporal parameters of a memorable event reminiscent in the gathering of the magicians

⁴ David A. Curtis, *World in Fragments: Writing on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 379.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Yakov F. Askin, “Philosophical Concept of Time,” in H. Agnessy, *Time and the Philosophies* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), p. 127.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ S. Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 41.

in the presence of Fir-aun indicated in Qur'an 26: 38.¹² In Islam, the barriers of time and space do not exist, owing to the limitation of the senses and knowledge; man cannot possess detailed knowledge of his existence. The world exists in a time-space-continuum.¹³ The origin of all things is one, Allah, who has the absolute knowledge of the limits of time (its space or epoch or parameters). All other things are only subject to movement or are in a motion that can be the life cycle or the planetary trajectory which are subservient to constant changes already computed. In the Qur'an, Allah indicates thus: "The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed."¹⁴ In explaining this verse, A. Yusuf Ali indicates thus: "In the great astronomical universe there are exact mathematical laws, which bear witness to God's Wisdom and also to His Favours to His creatures; for we all profit by the heat and light, the seasons, and the numerous changes in the tides and the atmosphere, on which the constitution of our globe and the maintenance of life depend."¹⁵

There are many shades or structures in the atmosphere and worlds of existence (*aalamiin*: the *aalimu-l-ghayb* and the *aalimu-sh-shahaadah*: the metaphysical and the physical worlds), but only one of these becomes a reality for an observer at any particular period or space of time.

Islamic Knowledge and Time in Retrospect

The religion of Islam has been with mankind from time immemorial, and its knowledge or wisdom encourages and promotes the classification of things according to their import.¹⁶ Time is not static from the perspective of Islam and every particular period of time, both past and present, presents its own challenge. Islamic knowledge is all-encompassing, i.e., it pervades through time and space without any limitation of sight. This contrasts with human wisdom which is myopic and shortsighted in its vision. The Qur'an

¹² Louis Gardet, "The Moslem View of Time and History: An Essay in Cultural Typology," in *Cultures and Time* (Paris: UNESCO, 1976).

¹³ <http://www.mustaqim.co.uk/briefguide/future.htm>, 11/02/2010.

¹⁴ Qur'an 55: 5.

¹⁵ A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (USA: Amana Corp., 1983), p. 1472, n. 5174.

¹⁶ http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-EnglishAsk_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503545350, 21/11/2009.

and the prophetic traditions, from the goggles of clairvoyance, made highly technical discoveries close to fourteen centuries ago that modern science has not been able to surpass from the view of the most powerful-lensed microscope.¹⁷ Certain happenings in life can never be predicted with exactness by man because he has no knowledge of such: “Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone). It is He Who sends down rain, and He Who knows what is in the wombs. Nor does anyone know what it is that he will earn on the morrow: Nor does anyone know in what land he is to die. Verily with Allah is full knowledge and He is acquainted (with all things).”¹⁸

Islamic knowledge, therefore, seeks to propound social, economic, political, cultural, and for that matter, living, theories that seek to provide a panacea for all entangling problems of humanity, both known and unknown. Islam has specific aspects of worship at every point of the year, month, week, day, and even hour as well as minute of the day. All these are units of time. The Qur’an and the prophetic traditions indicate clearly that Islam and its wisdom are sensitive to time: “By the time, surely man is in the state of loss.”¹⁹ Time has three principal characteristics: it is quick in movement; when it moves, it never looks back and, therefore, can never be compensated; it is a precious facility which has tremendous benefits when it is used profitably. Islamic knowledge puts events of the past in their proper perspective, explains the present, and makes sound projections into the future. Its basis is, therefore, applicable to all times. The Quran contains a myriad of verses that invite mankind to the use of the intellect in meditating about the purpose of the creation of human life and to discover the truth, which is *ibaadah*. In history, Islamic civilizations have observed a veritable salutation to knowledge. During the Abbasid regime, many traditional Islamic cities possessed public and private libraries, and cities like Cordoba

¹⁷ Reason with the interesting stages of the primordial development of man indicated in Qur’an 23: 12-13. Read also: Abdul-Majeed A. Zindani, et al., *Human Development as Described in the Qur’an and Sunnah: Correlation with Modern Embriology*, 2nd ed. (Makkah al-Mukarramah: Muslim World League, 2000).

¹⁸ Qur’an 31: 34.

¹⁹ Qur’an 103: 1-2.

and Baghdad boasted of libraries with over 400,000 books.²⁰ Such cities also had bookstores, some of which sold a large number of titles.²¹ The impact of Islamic knowledge in shaping the attitudes of people, both in the past and at present, and their cultural and socio-political advancement has been cited by various scholars. Nadwi argued that the rejuvenating currents of Islam ran through the world, infusing men everywhere with a new life and an unparalleled enthusiasm for progress. The lost values of life had been discovered. Paganism became a sign of reaction, while it was considered progressive to be associated with Islam. Even nations that did not come directly under the influence of Islam, profoundly, though unconsciously, benefited by the freshness and vitality of the new creative impulses released by its impact on large parts of the world. Numerous aspects of their thought and culture bear evidence to the magic touch of Islam. All the reform movements that arose in their midst, owed their origin to Islamic influences.²²

The Western world, in its customarily imitative character, has adopted many doctrines of Islamic teaching and built on them and has, cleverly, clouded this achievement of the Muslim world (the source of her pride) in mystery and turned to designate it as a collection of backward people whose wisdom only applied to the civilizations of the past, and as people whose legal systems are inhumane and encapsulated in lethal punishments. Yet, the West has succeeded in almost all aspects of human development through the metaphoric eyes of the Muslim world and her knowledge.²³ Islamic knowledge and its relevance to civilizations is a purely practical issue which relates not only to prophethood but also to the reality of life itself, the present and future of mankind, and the historic role played by Muslims in the development of culture and the building of flourishing civilizations. It is, therefore, a matter that should be central to the attention of a body rather than the single effort of an individual. In its depth and scope, it can compare with any discipline

²⁰ <http://www.islamicity.com/Mosque/IGC/knowledge.htm>, 21/11/2009. See also: S. M. M. Lari, trans. F. J. Goulding, *Western Civilization through Muslim Eyes*, Iran: FICPW, n.d., pp. 73-75.

²¹ <http://www.islamicity.com/Mosque/IGC/knowledge.htm>, 21/11/2009.

²² S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Islam and the World* (Lucknow, 1980), p. 87.

²³ For details, read: S.M.M. Lari, *Western Civilization through Muslim Eyes*, trans. F.J. Goulding (Iran: Foundation of Islamic C.P.W., 1977).

of thought pertaining to the life of man. It covers a significant area in time and space, from the first century of the Islamic era to this day, and from one corner of the world to the other. Islamic wisdom covers everything from creed to morals and behaviour, individual as well as social, and is linked with diverse phenomena, be they law, politics, international relations, arts, letters, poetry, architecture, cultural refinement, etc.²⁴ The knowledge that Islam has depicted about the growth of civilizations does not have any time tag. The Qur'an and *Sunnah* have put forward the principles of Islam. Yet, their explication and application are done in view of time needs and environmental circumstances. This perspective of informed interpretation of the wisdom of Islam in suiting the environmental needs of every group of people is known as *ijtihad*. This can be defined as: "Competency or legal ability to deduce rules of law through juristic speculation from original sources where definite authentic texts are not available."²⁵

The applicability of the Islamic knowledge to all time and space can be summarized in the following story told of a famous jurist: A man went to a popular jurist and said to him thus:

You argue that the Qur'an contains every principle to cater for modern needs. If so, can you show me whether the Qur'an teaches us how many loaves of bread can be made from a kilo of flour?' The jurist's answer is very significant to understanding the essence of the matter: 'Yes, the Qur'an teaches us how many loaves of bread can be made from a kilo of flour. It enjoins us to refer to the people of expert knowledge for what we do not know ourselves. Allah Almighty says, 'ask the followers of the reminder if ye know not' (Al-Anbiya' 21: 7) so, go and ask a baker about it.²⁶

²⁴ "Islam and Civilization," <http://www.nadwatululama.org/academy/books/civilization.htm>, 21/11/2009.

²⁵ http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1119503546052&pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaEAskTheScholar, 21/11/2009.

²⁶ http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?cid=1119503546052&pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaEAskTheScholar, 25/11/2009.

Islam is the only religion that established machinery for the perennial progression and development of human society according to the basic principles and perpetual values of life in its entirety.

The Theory of the Clash of Civilizations and the Islamic Factor

In a lecture in 1993, the late Professor Edward Said of Columbia University examined the theory of “clash of civilizations” propounded by the late Harvard University Professor Samuel Huntington. According to Huntington, there was a clear possibility of an inevitable conflict eruption between Western civilizations and the non-Western civilizations, particularly, Eastern powers, after the post-Cold War period, and this would be mainly a clash between the West and the Islamic world.²⁷ Huntington’s main thesis was that with the end of the Cold War, the ideological conflict between the East and the West would be replaced by identity-based conflict between groupings he referred to as civilizations.²⁸ He defined civilization as: “The highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of what distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined by both common language, history, religion, customs, institution and by the subjective self-identification of people.”²⁹

The striking aspect of this theory is the connection of civilization conflict with religion, of which a mention is made of Sino-Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin-American, and African civilizations, all of which include some aspects of religion in their definition and are, in fact, named after religions.³⁰ In other words, these civilizations are, for the most part, defined along religious lines. The debate was inaugurated in 1993 when the Professor’s theory, proposed in an article entitled: “The Clash of Civilizations,” appeared in *Foreign Affairs*. This article, which was met with sharp criticisms, was expanded in 1996 by the author in his book: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.³¹

²⁷ <http://craigconsidine.wordpress.com/2009/10/20/commentary-on-the-clash-of-civilizations-theory/>, 25/11/2009.

²⁸ Jonathan Fox, *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War: 1945 through the New Millennium* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 156.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

The emerging conflict that Huntington predicted would challenge the global dominance of the United States and threaten the very existence and preservation of Western cultural traditions.³² The most controversial postulation made by this theorist (Huntington) was his hypothesis that: “the Islamic civilization will be the most violent civilization and the primary threat to the West in the post-Cold War era.”³³ This theory, which was first presumed to have been built on the Western philosophy of skepticism, did not appear to have insulated itself from a preponderance of evidence that warned of a grand scheme against the West, but, rather, it seemed to have falsely predicted the aggressive political cupidity of the neo-conservative faction of the Republican Party of the U.S.³⁴

In a prolific statement, Huntington wrote thus: “The West must exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests, to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values, and to promote the involvement of non-Western states in those institutions.”³⁵ This statement did not make sense at that time because the Islamic world, as he predicted, was not at loggerheads with the West, and he himself did not seem to have provided a clear framework for the expressions “culture” and “civilizations” to ground the whole premise of his argument. Islam is homogenous but the most diverse entity ever known to humanity. It is not merely a religion. It is also a code of life and a culture, and, as such and most importantly, a political ideology, which is universal and inescapable in its socio-cultural effort. It pervades every aspect of social cooperation and culture, and this makes it impregnable and organized in its approach to every aspect of human culture irrespective of environment. After the Cold War, so-called “Democratic Liberalism” was deemed to

³² <http://craigconsidine.wordpress.com/2009/10/20/commentary-on-the-clash-of-civilizations-theory/>, 25/11/2009.

³³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 183, as cited by Jonathan Fox, *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War: 1945 through the New Millennium*, p. 168.

³⁴ <http://craigconsidine.wordpress.com/2009/10/20/commentary-on-the-clash-of-civilizations-theory/>, 25/11/2009.

³⁵ <http://craigconsidine.wordpress.com/2009/10/20/commentary-on-the-clash-of-civilizations-theory/>, 25/11/2009.

have emerged victorious over its ideological opponents, the non-Western socio-political systems. They were deemed to have all been ideologically conquered. But unknown was one state ideology: a bitter rival, a perceived implacable opponent, a capable and a difficult-to-challenge contestant for world domination, and, in fact, a direct opposite of the West in every respect: Islam, which endured without the least injury.

An ambitious but grossly miscalculated attempt to subjugate this remaining “threat,” Islam, brought into wake the notorious and forever regretted clash of civilizations, a conglomeration of Western superior artillery powers against a poorly armed but ideologically strong Islam. Amazingly, Western culture is inextricably intertwined with Islamic knowledge, teachings, and philosophy,³⁶ and it is now accepted without the slightest measure of reservation that Islam is the fastest growing religion in America, and the less one talks in respect of this in Europe, the better. Christian fundamentalists have more in common with the so-called Muslim militants than with the East Coast or French intellectuals.³⁷ From Spain to India, the incessant friction and fertilizing interactions with Islam shaped Western values, beliefs, doctrines, moral tenets, and political and military institutions, including the arts and the sciences.³⁸

Is Islam at war with the West for domination in the world or is it just a hidden other? Muslims certainly wish that everybody in the world was a Muslim, yet facts from this revelation can certainly not be a justifiable answer to the above question. This is because Muslims have built a myriad of inclusivist civilizations in which non-Muslims have enjoyed a great level of autonomy both in terms of religion and law. In the very first written constitution of the world: the Madinan Charter, drafted as far back as the seventh century in the historic city of Madinah, non-Muslims, including traditional worshippers, were granted freedom of worship.³⁹ In fact, Islam has

³⁶ <http://samvak.tripod.com/islam.html>, 30/11/2009. For better details, read: S. M. M. Lari, trans. F. J. Goulding, *Western Civilization through Muslim Eyes*, Iran: FICPW, n.d.

³⁷ <http://samvak.tripod.com/islam.html>, 30/11/2009.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Safiur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheekul Makhtum: The Sealed Nectar; Biography of the Noble Prophet (SAW)*, rev. edition (Riyadh: Darus Salam, 2001), pp. 393-395.

condemned compulsion in matters of religion: “Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And Allah hears and knows all things.”⁴⁰

In line with this, Muhammad did not force Islam on even those non-Muslims who accepted to live under the protection of the Islamic administration.⁴¹ Even in recent times, when extremism is so rife in several Muslim countries, there are still proudly significant numbers of non-Muslims who unrestrictedly worship in synagogues. A clear case in point is the Coptic Christians in the Islamic Republic of Egypt. In fact, even in Saudi Arabia, the citadel of the Islamic civilization, a sizeable number of foreign and non-Muslim citizens are living and going about their normal duties, when in a country like the Vatican, Muslims simply cannot live and continue to practice their religion without intimidation.

The above argument goes to buttress the fact that Muslims do not mean any harm when they close their social borders to the perceived rotten Western socio-political and economic idiosyncrasies. Islam only wants the best for its people. Nonetheless, Islam did not prevent its ideologies from overlapping into the borders of the West. Even though certain Islamic ideologies have been blindly criticized from Western spectacles as backward and irrelevant to contemporary times, they have, nevertheless, been incorporated without any genuine and objective notice. The success of this unnoticed incorporation is the fact that Islam and its knowledge wisdom are applicable to every biota at any period of time.

The West-Islam clash is based on a futile attempt to disingenuously thwart the effort of a divine determination, in the Islamic world, to: “establish God’s authority on earth; to arrange human affairs according to the true guidance provided by God; to abolish all the Satanic forces and Satanic system of life; to end the lordship of one man over others, since all men are creatures of God and no one has the authority to make them his servants or to make

⁴⁰ Qur’an 2: 256.

⁴¹ Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Pubs., 1996), p. 4.

arbiter laws for them."⁴² This is a fair ground for the declaration of *jihad*.⁴³ In the view of the popular Sayyid Qutb, Islamic *jihad* connotes the following:

To secure complete freedom for every man throughout the world by releasing him from servitude to other human beings so that he may serve his God, who is one and who has no associates. This is in itself a sufficient reason for *jihad*. These were the only reasons in the hearts of Muslim warriors. If they had been asked the question, "Why are you fighting?" none would have answered, "My country is in danger; I am fighting for its defense," or "The Persians and the Romans have come upon us," "We want to extend our dominion and want more spoils."⁴⁴

Muslims fighting today in the so-called civilization clash would respond the same way as Huzaifah b. Muhsin and his colleagues answered the Persian General Rostum when the latter demanded to know from them thus: "For what purpose have you come?" during the siege of Persia in the Battle of Qadisiyyah. Their response was:

God has sent us to bring anyone who wishes from servitude to men into the service of God alone, from the narrowness of this world into the vastness of this world and the hereafter, and from the tyranny of religions into the justice of Islam. God raised a messenger for this purpose to teach His creatures His way. If any accepts this way of life, we turn back and give his country back to him, and we fight with those who rebel until we are martyred or become victorious.⁴⁵

Contrary to the belief that Muslims are in conflict with Western powers as a protest against their threats of aggression against their fellows or the occupation of their territories, the above abstracts indicate that the general wisdom of Islam aimed, is aiming, and will aim at proclaiming universal freedom that will mitigate human

⁴² Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Beirut: The Holy Koran Pub. House, 1980), p. 127.

⁴³ Literally, strive in the path of the righteous and of Allah.

⁴⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 127-8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

conditions with relevant methods and developing new resources for living at every period or stage of life.⁴⁶

The reason for aggression of Muslims, popularly known as *jihaad*,⁴⁷ in this clash, therefore, exists in the nature of its message and the conditions of the society in which it finds itself, and not merely in the necessity of defense of, or struggle for, cultural identity that may be ephemeral and limited in extent.⁴⁸ Islam exists to establish God's universal rule in the world and invites people to the concrete reality of its message in the form of a community that guarantees freedom from servitude to *jaahili* leadership to servitude to God in the ultimate subscription to His right ways, the *sharii'ah*. To ensure this, Muslims must fight every barrier that serves as an insurmountable barricade to right human reason and intuition without interference from foreign political systems.⁴⁹ The civilization clash between the Islamic World and the West, therefore, exploded as an inauthentic by-product of a disingenuous desire of the latter to eliminate and obstruct the establishment of human values and morality based on the all-encompassing religious wisdom of Islam which was dearer to the former than the latter estimated. The standard of Islam and its knowledge of morality which the former sought to irrespectively protect under the auspices of *jihaad*, is not determined by cultural or environmental conditions, economic circumstances, or the stage of a society's development, all of which are trivial differences.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The paper discussed the Islamic approach to the concept of time, knowledge and the clash of civilizations. The paper spearheads the argument that Islam and its wisdom are universal and applicable to all cultural surroundings irrespective of time. It also stresses the all-encompassing nature of its wisdom or knowledge (which is beyond the absolute restriction of time and space) and its approach to the clash of civilizations and proves the limitedness of human knowledge and vision which do not penetrate into the spectra of the future or eminence. The theoretical basis of the research was Samuel

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 129.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

P. Huntington's controversial theory of the clash of civilizations which postulated the alleged Islamic civilization threat to Western influence. This research indicated that for Muslims, the conflict or clash between the Islamic nations and Western powers is not a struggle for territorial or cultural identity and aggrandizement as the theory postulated, or a struggle for territorial self-defense, but a result of the desire of the West to eliminate and obstruct the establishment of human values and morality based on the all-encompassing religious wisdom of Islam which is dearer to the Islamic nations than the West estimated.

Part II
On Globalization and the Question of
Cultural Identity

2.

Between Universalism and Cultural Identity: Revisiting the Motivation for an African Logic¹

UDUMA OJI UDUMA

Introduction

The dominant motivation for African logic unarguably is the identity requirement. The need for identity engenders the professing of cultural relativism; cultural relativism becomes, as it were, a reply to the cultural uniformity (often, but plausibly with historical hindsight, stigmatized as cultural imperialism) that it is claimed that dominant nations want to impose on the rest of the world through the affirmation of universality. Thus, in a more nuanced sense, the concept of particularism emerges from the assertion of the right to be different; indeed, cultural relativism is often bandied about as a guise for cultural identity.

It is thus not surprising that the quest for a distinctive African logic (as well as the more encompassing question of African philosophy) has been more or less a quest for African identity. This is brought to a prominent relief in Udo Etuk's proposal for enculturation of logic. According to him:

¹ *Abstract* The motivation for cultural identity is often tailored to imply a repudiation of universalism. This is because, whereas cultural identity seeks to emphasize that human cognition always takes place in definite and particular historical and socio-cultural contexts, universalism has always played down, nay deemphasized, those elements of cognition that are supposedly distinctive and unique to socio-cultural contexts. The attempt to elucidate what constitutes a definite and distinctive logical cognition has in its wake led to the advocacy of a peculiar African logic. This paper, using philosophical and historical approaches, explores the motivation for a peculiar African (regional) logic with a view to harmonizing cultural identity persuasion with universalism. It accepts that there are peculiar socio-cultural African experiences, but seeks to demonstrate the need to transcend jingoism in the advocacy for an African logic. For sure, the ideals and goals of the African cultural identity are legitimate, and there is need to highlight what we perceive to be our unique logical heritage, but all these do not and cannot support the repudiation of universal thought (logical) processes.

In proposing “The Possibility of African Logic,” this paper is clearly riding on the crest of what I take to be the success story in African philosophy. African philosophy has come to stay, if not come of age. It has attained respectability...Here we are barely settling the skirmish over whether or not there is any such thing as African philosophy. And before that is settled, someone wants to stir the hornet’s nest by raising a more exacting question, namely the possibility of African logic. Philosophers know the centrality of the role of logic in the study of philosophy, and that logic is the most exacting and rigorous of the philosophical disciplines. Indeed, some scholars are prepared to say that only logic and epistemology constitute philosophy properly speaking.²

Etuk’s sentiments above would be properly appreciated against the backdrop of the fact that Robin Horton³ had argued that logic lies at the core of philosophy, and its demonstrable absence in traditional Africa reinforces the obvious absence of philosophy in African traditional thought system. But today the question of African philosophy is obviously no longer that of whether it exists or not; even for those who would ordinarily hesitate to acknowledge its existence, it has gradually dawned on all that at least the robust debate as to the existence or non-existence of African philosophy in a rather undeniable sense created African philosophy. It is also evident that in many respects, the responses to the question of an African philosophy actually helped to determine the subject matter, nature, approach and, perhaps, goals of African philosophy.⁴ For Etuk, therefore, after such a success story, it amounts to sheer mischief to

² Udo Etuk, “The Possibility of African Logic,” in Olusegun Oladipo, ed., *The Third Way in African Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Kwasi Wiredu* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2002), pp. 99-100.

³ Robin Horton, “Traditional Thought and the African Philosophy Department: A Comment on the Debate on the Current Debate,” *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy* III, no. 1 (1977), p. 65.

⁴ U.O. Uduma, “The New Challenge facing the Existence of African Philosophy,” *African Journal of Social Policy and Administration* 2, no. 2 (2009), p. 122.

contemplate, much less raise the question of, whether or not there is African logic. For him, and perhaps plausibly, once we have settled the question of African philosophy, it follows necessarily that there is African logic; the “implicate” of domesticating and enculturating philosophy “will be that there has to be an African logic, if there is African philosophy.”⁵ This is echoed by Ijioma: “If logic is a part of philosophy and philosophy is culture bound, it follows necessarily that logic is culture bound.”⁶ The possibility of African logic here is the off-shoot of the existence of African philosophy, and a clear understanding of Etuk and his talk of success story and stirring the hornet’s nest brings to a prominent relief the identity problem that inspired the disquisition and subsequent emergence of African philosophy. But it is our contention that there is a real need to rise above the identity problem and come to the realization that logic is universal, that there is no cultural or regional logic; the call for African logic is thus only tendentious.

The Challenge of an African Identity

What is called African philosophy today largely emerged as reaction to the absolutist paradigm of Western philosophy which, in assuring the universalization of Eurocentrism, not only created a truncated view of reality but disparaged the African as “mentally inferior,” “backward,” “uncivilised,” “barbarian” and the “savage.”

In a sense, the motivation for the attachment of the adjective “African” to philosophy is emotively, rather than philosophically, inspired. Afrocentrists, like Alexis Kagame and Leopold Sedar Senghor, had canvassed the position that there was (or at least there ought to be) a peculiar way of philosophizing common to all Africans.⁷ For sure, this was a tremendous route to the issue of African identity.⁸ To establish African philosophy meant both the taking of a stand “for or against” the horrifying events and

⁵ Udo Etuk, “The Possibility of African Logic,” p. 100.

⁶ C.O. Ijioma, *Modern Logic* (Owerri: A. P. Publications, 1995), p. 11.

⁷ Godfrey I. Onah, “The Universal and the Particular in Wiredu’s Philosophy of Human Nature,” in Olusegun Oladipo, ed., *The Third Way in African Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Kwasi Wiredu* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2002), p. 67.

⁸ H. Olela, “The African Foundations of Greek Philosophy,” in E.C. Eze, ed., *African Philosophy: An Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 48-49.

ideologies inflicted on Africa by its violent encounter with the West⁹ and a guise intended to achieve intellectually what some African states sought to achieve by warfare.¹⁰ Negritude as a philosophy derives its roots from such a counter-discourse about the African. Not only was there the urgency to liberate Africans themselves from European domination, Africans also fought to define that identity, to establish themselves as Africans. Both as a quest for freedom and an attempt to define their identity as Africans does the philosophical task of the pioneer African philosophers arise.¹¹ Indeed, the problem of identity continues to determine all philosophizing about Africa. In this regard, the major preoccupation of African philosophers revolves around a single task: searching out answers to, and devising ways of attaining, the purposed goals of African people.

If, however, one reflects on the fact that under the delusion that it incarnated Reason, Europe arrogated to itself the self-imposed task of civilizing other peoples steeped in darkness and ignorance – a claim bolstered by the critical philosophy of Kant – he will naturally support the sentiment for the African search for identity. In this regard we note that Europe considers herself as an exemplar of humanity distinguished between the Self and the Other, characterising the latter as “half devil and half child.” She further universalises her particularities, annihilating in the process the history and culture, and the socio-economic and political institutions of the dehumanised Other.¹² It is shocking but nevertheless true that these ideas were inspired by philosophical assumptions of supposed critical and presumably reputable philosophers like Hume, Kant, Hegel, and J.S. Mill. We are aware of the degrading comments about blacks by these philosophers. Hume proclaims that all other species of humankind, especially the Negroes, are inferior to European

⁹ E. Wamba-Dia-Wamba, “Philosophy in Africa: Challenges of the African Philosopher,” in Tsenay Serequeberhan, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), p. 246.

¹⁰ T. Serequeberham, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), pp. 11-14.

¹¹ M. Asiegbu, “African Philosophy: Problems, Debates, Approaches, and Challenges,” *Flash: Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 2, no. 39 (2008).

¹² *Ibid.*

stock, while Kant deems the European race intellectually superior to all others.¹³

It is interesting to note that while Kant assigns to the white race the capacity for rational character or moral dignity, non-whites are denied the same ability or, at best, are assigned minimal (i.e. pseudo-rational-moral) abilities. The inferiority of non-whites derives from the presence of “phlogiston” in their blood, the simple fact that they are either black or coloured. Indeed, “while the black person is denied humanity and is therefore uncivilized, humanity accrues only to the superior European civilization which depicts humanity par excellence.”¹⁴ And if black or coloured means non-humanity, it equally implies that the Negro lacks talent, that is, where talent is understood as an “essential natural ingredient for aptitude in higher rational and moral achievement.”¹⁵ To buttress his position, Kant noted, with regard to David Hume’s *Essays on National Character*, that

Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality; even among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.¹⁶

¹³ R.H. Popkin, “Hume’s Racism,” *The Philosophical Forum* 9, nos. 2-3 (1977), pp. 213, 217.

¹⁴ E. Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant and Goethe*, trans. J. Cutman *et al.* (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 11; E.C. Eze, “The Colour of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology,” in E.C. Eze, ed., *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), p. 121.

¹⁵ E.C. Eze, “The Colour of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology,” p. 126.

¹⁶ I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. V. L. Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978).

This is short of saying that the Negro or Black is subhuman. To substantiate this latter point Kant drew up a hierarchical chart of the superior to the inferior hues of the skin as follows:

STEM GENUS: white brunette

First race, very blond (northern Europe), of damp cold.

Second race, Copper-Red (America), of dry cold.

Third race, Black (Senegambia), of dry heat.

Fourth race, Olive-Yellow (Indians), of dry heat.¹⁷

The hierarchicization of the races is done with the belief that “white brunette” or “white” is the ideal colour or skin. All others are superior or inferior as they approximate whiteness. In fact, all other colours are simply degenerative developments from the white original.

In a sense, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is meant to demonstrate the transcendental, and, therefore, the metaphysical and biological, superiority of white over black. This might be one of the essential reasons why Kant had to extol “reason” over “imagination.” Thus the recoil from delineating the transcendental object X (which Kant refers to as the unknown root) and the theory of noumena (which Kant dismisses as complete emptiness), would have taken him away from eulogizing the Enlightenment spirit which he so much cherished and stoutly defended.¹⁸ In other words, the break into pure ontological analysis would have taken Kant away from the pettiness and prejudices of anthropologism (in this instance, race analytic). But he rather chose to extol and propagate the supposedly white supremacy thesis. His choice, it is highly argued, must have been informed by the European colonization of the rest of the world and, perhaps, the enslavement of the Negroid race through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

In his archetype classification of race, by which Kant means the “prefixed humanity inevitably inherited by nature, that is, that which is *a priori*, transcendently grounded and immutable” talent, rationality, humanity proper and, therefore, history, is embodied in the European life or, more precisely, in the European male. On the other hand, the “so-called sub-human, primitive, and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁸ See I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn (London, 1964).

characterological inferiority of the American Indian, the African, and the Asian is a biologically and metaphysically inherited archetype."¹⁹

This racist prejudice is extended by Hegel, for whom, if perchance, the African has any iota of rationality to exhibit it certainly derives from the Asiatic or European world. This conclusion follows from the basic premise that Africa could not boast of any history, development, or any progress. According to Hegel, the "civilised [European] nation is conscious that the rights of barbarians [Africans] are unequal to its own and treats their autonomy as only a formality."²⁰ Predatory and disquieting as these philosophies were in propping up European supremacist ideology and traducing Africa's image, more heinous is the fact that the prejudgments and misconceptions were articulated and passed on as "transcendental wisdom."²¹

It is thus not surprising that colonization (which itself wrecked Africa of its history, heritage and culture) was conceived as a paternalistic mission, a civilizing adventure which was meant to make the African, hitherto conceived as a primate, a "civilized" human being. Indeed, for Hugh Trevor Roper, the only history which Africa has is the history of Europeans in her territory, noting that "the rest is darkness and darkness is not a subject of history."²² J.S. Mill sums it up by saying that "despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with Barbarians provided the end is to be their improvement."²³ This is an obvious allusion to the white supremacy and black inferiority which, for Mill, justifies tyranny as a means to development. The identity problem captured above gave rise to a number of issues and debates in African philosophy. Primary among them is the relation of culture to philosophy.²⁴

¹⁹ I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, pp. 124-25.

²⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: University Press, 1973), p. 213.

²¹ T. Serequeberham, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, pp. 3-28.

²² Hugh T. Roper, quoted in Ali Mazrui, "Political Nostalgia," *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* 3, no. 2 (1981), p. 6.

²³ J.S. Mill, introduction to *On Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912).

²⁴ M. Asiegbu, "African Philosophy: Problems, Debates, Approaches, and Challenges," p. 40.

Culture and Philosophy

In the face of such a traduced image of Africa, the issue of identity was fundamental and a compelling one. As Basil Davidson notes, the debunking of this so-called supremacy of whites over blacks, or the inferiority of blacks to whites, is “the beginning of historiographical wisdom.”²⁵ This wisdom is creating an identity for Africa. The desire to argue against the prevalent negative discourse about Africa was thus compelling enough to ignite the need for African philosophy. Okere thus submits that African philosophy indexes an attempt of the Africans to establish their identity.²⁶ Africans, therefore, seek to establish their identity by recourse to their culture. In short, African philosophy investigates “the lived concerns of a culture and of a tradition, as they are disclosed by questions posed from within a concrete situation, that serve as the bedrock on which and out of which philosophical reflection is established.”²⁷

Ordinarily, in a professional and technical sense, philosophy is an academic discipline (in the university) with a set of codes, standards, recognized practitioners, and customs. Yet it is contended that there can be no disciplinary structure without critical engagement in a life-world.²⁸ Elliot thus eulogizes both Hegel and Nietzsche for eschewing the manner and method of the famous “armchair odyssey” of Descartes’ *Meditations* in favour of seeing philosophy as integrally bound up with human culture.²⁹

Importantly, historically, the academic study of philosophy has its roots in various colonial versions of philosophy. This indexes the need for philosophy not to be limited or reducible to that history; this is worsened by the situation in which questions about African philosophy’s existence by non-Africans often amounted to an implicit dismissal of Africa, as those questions come with the

²⁵ Basil Davidson, *African Civilization Revisited* (New Jersey: African World Press Inc., 1991), p. 26.

²⁶ T. Okere, *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), p. vii.

²⁷ T. Serequeberham, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, p. 13.

²⁸ Bruce Janz, “African Philosophy,” Accessed: Jan. 06, 2006, <http://www.pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/janzb/papers/37Afphil.pdf>, p. 1

²⁹ L. J. Elliot, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: Philosophy, Culture and Agency* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 18.

presumption that there is no philosophy in Africa, shifting the onus on those who claim there is to prove it. "These seemingly dismissive questions," Janz argues, could be taken most charitably and in that context understood as "the perennial impulse of philosophy anywhere – the move back to sources, roots, beginnings, or the things themselves."³⁰

Indeed, for Janz, the requirement for the investigation into the possibility and identity of African philosophy is an implied insult or challenge to be answered or ignored, or an opportunity to exercise a fundamental philosophical impulse, which is to self-critically examine the foundations or starting-points of truth, meaning, existence, and value. Fortunately, many African philosophers took the challenge. But this, Janz pointed out, was not easily dealt with as in "British philosophy" or "Chinese philosophy," where there is a history of textuality that allows the philosopher to refer to a historically specific set of ideas and issues that have been part of a conversation over time. He (Janz) submits that:

African philosophy has comparatively few texts before the middle of the twentieth century, and fewer sustained conversations among those texts. British philosophy tends not to philosophically reflect on the question of what it means to be British, while African philosophy does tend to philosophically reflect on the question of what it means to be African. So, a great deal of African philosophy in the twentieth century has focussed on addressing meta-philosophical questions.³¹

The point of the foregoing is that since there can be no disciplinary structure without critical engagement in a life-world, philosophy is integrally bound up with human culture and the paucity of literary texts in constructing African philosophy of necessity binds African philosophy with traditional African culture.

This binding of philosophy with culture raises a number of questions. First, do cultural forms such as proverbs, songs, tales, and other forms of oral tradition count as philosophy in themselves, or are they merely the potential objects of philosophical analysis?

³⁰ Bruce Janz, "African Philosophy," p. 2.

³¹ Bruce Janz, "African Philosophy," p. 3.

Second, does the wisdom of sages count as philosophy, or is that wisdom, at best, merely the object of philosophical analysis? Third, is African philosophy African because it draws on tradition in some way? To take another line of inquiry, if we think of African philosophy as a discipline, where does disciplinarity come from, and what is its justification? Is African philosophy really a form of anthropology? Does it have more in common with literature, religion, or politics than with Western philosophy? These questions generate one of the most fundamental controversies in African philosophy, which is over ethnophilosophy, and Janz lists seven reactions to this position.³²

First, some people simply continued to believe that African philosophy was the anonymously held and uncritical world-views of communities, along with their description and analysis. Second, others³³ used Quinean linguistic philosophy and phenomenology to argue that there was philosophical content in the shared world-views of traditional Africans, and that it was accessible by closely analyzing language. Third, some (for instance, Kwame Gyekye, and Gerald Wanjohi) attempted to locate specific philosophical beliefs or statements in traditional African culture, in folk tales, proverbs, dilemma tales, and so forth. Fourth, writers such as Claude Sumner argued that the textual history was deeper than it seemed, and that there were, in fact, philosophical texts in traditional Africa. Fifth, some³⁴ suggested hybrid or more sophisticated approaches that draw on the cultural insight of ethnophilosophy while giving it a more rigorous form. Sixth, others (for example, Odera Oruka) argued that there was an intermediate position between ethnophilosophy and academic philosophy. There was philosophy in traditional Africa that was not simply folk wisdom (located in the sages), but that often required the mediation of a trained philosopher to bring it to the surface. And, seventh and finally, there was a group of people who agreed with Hountondji, and therefore downplayed folk wisdom. Philosophy, for them, was rigorous textual and explicitly critical

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³³ For example, Barry Hallen and J.O. Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

³⁴ See Ivan Karp and D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

analysis, and traditional world-views in Africa were no different, and no more philosophical, than Western folk tales.

These reactions in a way show that all the trends in African philosophy mapped by Henry Odera Oruka³⁵ in one way or the other deal with African philosophy as being necessarily rooted in the traditional belief systems of Africa.

First, ethnophilosophy regards the collective traditional wisdom or the generally held ontological assumptions and worldview of African ethnic groups or tribes as having the status of philosophy.

Second, Sage Philosophy (Philosophic Sagacity) defends the view that, despite the overweening non-literate nature of ethnic Africans, wise men or sage philosophers, who reflect critically on the cultures, traditions, worldviews and reality of the African universe, abound. A contemporary African philosopher, in this regard, has a task: one of seeking out these sage philosophers to dialogue with them and document their reflections or their philosophies.

Third, Nationalistic/ Ideological Philosophy urges that African political philosophy rise from the critical and interpretative reflection on the multiple possibilities engendered by the African anti-colonial discourse. With national and African liberation struggles, both thinkers and politicians set about the task of producing a political system of government suited to the African condition. Such forms of governance aim at liberating African states from the clutches of colonialism, imperialism and various forms of foreign domination. An engaging critical reflection on the multiple possibilities, embedded in abundant texts that African anti-colonial discourse has engendered, would ground African political philosophy. Thus, in such political views as Zik's welfarism, Nyerere's Ujamaa, Kaunda's Humanism, and Mobutu Sese Seko's Authenticité, one discovers also some philosophical attempts at addressing political problems by recourse to African culture.

Fourth, Professional Philosophy (albeit prima facie being opposed to recourse to traditional thought) is still paradoxically Afrocentric in that if ethnophilosophy incarnates a positive response to Tempels's work, *Bantu Philosophy*, the Professional school marks

³⁵ H.O. Oruka, "Four Trends in African Philosophy," in A. Diemer, ed., *Symposium on Philosophy in the Present Situation of Africa* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981); H.O. Oruka, "Sage Philosophy," in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux, eds., *The African Philosophy Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998).

the negative reaction to the same work. Philosophers of this persuasion criticize ethnophilosophy for failing to come to terms with the colonialist ambivalences, ambiguities and contradictions employed to “placate, minimize, and bypass the obdurate cultural resistance of the colonized.”³⁶ Thus where Tempels’s work constitutes the touchstone for ethnophilosophy, the professional current represents a “scientistic attempt” decidedly disparaging of the mode of thought that Tempels pursues. Truly, nothing but the politics of colonialism inspired both trends.

Fifth, Hermeneutic Philosophy, as evidenced in the works of Barry Hallen, Okere, and J. O. Sodipo, as well as the work of Kwame Gyekye, is the analysis of African languages for the sake of finding philosophical content. Arguing the view that philosophy is culture-bound and temporal, Okere insists that African philosophy, much like Western philosophy, involves an interpretation of the possible elements of philosophy embedded in African culture.

Sixth, Literary/Artistic Philosophy indexes literary figures such as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Okot p’Bitek, and Taban lo Liyong, who reflect on African culture within essays as well as fictional works.

Both from the reactions and trends, we note that culture provides the raw material for philosophy. As a result, a philosopher, however intense his love of wisdom, would be devoid of any material for speculation should he do away with culture. In a sense, without culture, philosophy is impossible. For Okere, the major reason for such close boundedness of philosophy to culture is that philosophy is an interpretation, a hermeneutics, a quest for meaning, an attempt at giving meaning to man’s world.³⁷ All attempts at interpretation begin with man himself. As it were, man’s attempt at giving meaning entails a self-interpretation. So understood, man’s structure and constitution determine his interpretation (philosophy). Any philosophy that results from this auto-interpretation bears the imprint of man’s limitations and features. One discovers that man’s understanding of his world and his experience of it are all at once “limited, culture-bound and so historical and situated, and finite.”³⁸

³⁶ T. Serequeberham, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, p. 11.

³⁷ T. Okere, “The Relation between Culture and Philosophy,” *UCHE* 2, no. 9 (1976).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

But it is unarguable that wisdom sayings and lore of knowledge, enshrined in traditions and passed on by one generation to the other, do not constitute philosophy. Nevertheless, where none of the cultural essentials or constituents of a culture make a philosophy, a philosopher, by systematically reflecting on the non-philosophical cultural elements, with a view to imbuing them with meaning, produces a philosophy. So understood, philosophy involves an orderly, organized, critical reflection on a people's entire experience mediated in their culture. The philosopher makes a systematic use of reason,³⁹ as his sole tool, to carry out his work – that of attempting to give an ultimate meaning and purpose to reality as a whole. Philosophy differs from a worldview; it criticises worldviews and the ways they organize reality. Philosophy entails a sustained and systematic questioning, and calls the conception of reality, as worldviews crafted it, into question; a worldview merely states facts about reality without challenging them. A worldview states the facts relating to reality just as they have been constituted and no more. Philosophy, on the other hand, challenges worldviews and their ways of presenting the facts. Philosophy typifies a critical reflective questioning spirit of an individual committed to philosophising about the problems and difficulties facing a people from within their milieu.

If philosophy, as Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker presents it, implies continuous questioning – “asking further” questions⁴⁰ –, the questioning leaves no presuppositions. Rather, it calls every dimension of culture and all knowledge into question. No part is shielded from the critical questioning of the philosopher, whose purpose is to dub reality with meaning. In this regard, philosophy is “a permanent interrogation of reality through our culture.”⁴¹ Conceived in this way, it is clear that philosophy is not culture; neither does a popular conception serve as philosophy, properly understood. Actually, if culture defines the way of life of a people, then it is not philosophy. A people's way of life embraces a long list of unending items, embracing their lore of knowledge, their

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-11.

⁴⁰ Quoted in T. Okere, *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility*, p. 1; T. Okere, “The Relation between Culture and Philosophy,” pp. 4-11.

⁴¹ T. Okere, “The Relation between Culture and Philosophy,” p. 6.

philosophy and proverbs, their artefacts, their feasts, their pride and prejudices, celebrations, songs and funerals, patterns of doing things and poetry, language and medicine, commerce and craft, their cosmology, legends, myths, witticisms, wise-sayings, laws and customs, religion and their conceptual framework and, indeed, whatever makes their pattern of life together, which all form their culture. Considered in this way, one cannot equate culture to philosophy. While culture provides the raw material for philosophy, culture is not philosophy.

The Motivation for Enculturating Logic

Logic, both historically and conventionally, is one of the core specialisms of philosophy; as such, the existence of an African philosophy is supposed to dovetail with the existence of an African logic. So even if we cannot currently present one, the possibility exists. After all, African philosophy itself is relatively very recent, and for it to overcome the tension that governed its emergence, its corollary, African Logic, should be accepted, even if it is only conceptually.

Indeed, African philosophy is an issue of identity with widespread ramifications. Thus, when African philosophy addresses the issue of African identity, the issue of an African logic is wont to feature. In this context, the remark by Horton, already highlighted above, makes it even more important; the need for the desire to argue for an African logic is a way of showing that Africans are capable of exacting and rigorous intellectual display.

Horton rather equivocatively argued that “although all the main processes of inference known to modern man are deployed in African traditional thought either in the maintenance of the established world view...or in its elaboration or modification...such processes are deployed in an essentially unreflective manner.”⁴² According to him, in Africa, instead of employing intuition and ideas, we have a rich proliferation of the sort of thinking called *magical*. He thus concludes that in traditional Africa, “People do not stop to ask what are the irreducibly basic processes of inference, or

⁴² Robin Horton, “Traditional Thought and the African Philosophy Department,” p. 65.

how they can be justified? Situations which would provide such questions simply do not arise."⁴³

Indeed, for Horton, there is only one reality, and so there can only be one rationality as well.⁴⁴ Societies that do not use the modern Western scientific method are "closed" societies because they cannot imagine alternatives to their views of the world, and also because there is no real distinction between words and reality. Words are not reality in modern society, and Horton argues that this allows the words to take on explanatory rather than magical characteristics. Kwasi Wiredu and D.A. Masolo agree with Horton's commitment to the universality of reason, although both would argue that it is a mistake to compare Western science and traditional African thought. Horton's position in stigmatizing traditional African thought as magical when canvassing a commitment to universality was in a sense an invitation to particularity; African philosophy was challenged to go into its culture to assure its logical structure. Thus, the denigration of African traditional thought was only wont to elicit some jingoistic passion from some African philosophers, particularly when it became clear that even the irredentists and sceptics could no longer reasonably sustain the denial of African philosophy. To square up to the need to establish an identity in an irredentist culture from the assertion that there exists African philosophy, it became necessary that there is a peculiar African logic. To immediately dismiss this sentiment is to fail to recognize the uneven and asymmetrical development of world cultures, and that people need to cultivate a specific sense of belongingness in order to survive and enhance their positive identity and self-esteem. We recognize in this context that particularization is a locally oriented process which produces cultural meanings from local perspectives and concrete life experiences.

Peter Winch, however, takes the position that reason is inextricably linked to language and culture, and therefore (following Wittgenstein), it is possible to consider separate systems to be

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Robin Horton, "African Traditional Religion and Western Science," *Africa* 37, nos. 1-2 (1967), pp. 50-71.

rational yet incommensurable.⁴⁵ This sentiment seems implied in Helen Verran's recent *Science and an African Logic* when she suggests:

If we are to be convincing in asserting that mathematical objects have been constructed by people as they went about their living as social beings, more than the conditions of their production must be demonstrated. We must be able to show what people have used to accomplish the construction of these objects in their interactions with each other and the material world, and how they have used them.⁴⁶

The point is that culture situates a philosopher, limiting him to a specifically designed group and the experience, problems, difficulties and presuppositions of a particular people. In addition, culture gives an orientation to his philosophy in so far as he seeks to provide ultimate answers to questions, and solutions to problems of a people of a particular culture. Since all philosophical discourse involves seeking answers to problems and issues that a culture raises, then a culture is determinative of philosophy. As different and varied as cultures are, so also are the questions, answers and philosophies they generate.⁴⁷

Culture, however significant it is, remains limited to a specific region. The European culture is different from African, American, or Asiatic cultures, for instance. The geographical particularity of a culture raises the issue of relativism of a philosophy tied to a particular culture. The different cultures into which philosophies are inserted imbue the various philosophies with a relativistic character. These cultures individualise those philosophies. A creative work in any philosophy, especially African philosophy, implies a solid grasp of the (African) culture. It entails a mastery of its lore of knowledge, symbols and symbolism, artefacts, legends and language, laws and customs, poetry and pastimes, celebrations and funerals, religion etc. Only through this way can African philosophers give meaning ultimately to African identity.

⁴⁵ Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964), pp. 307-324.

⁴⁶ Helen Verran, *Science and an African Logic* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 260n2.

⁴⁷ M. Asiegbu, "African Philosophy," p. 42.

In essence, it is only through a particularist logic, enriched and determined by its culture, that African philosophy can avoid another European-generated approach to human understanding that focuses in such an emphatic manner on elements that were said to be universal to human understanding because of concerns that such an overview could underrate or ignore elements to African cognition that were distinctive, or perhaps even somehow unique.

This essay rejects this position not because the motivation is ill-founded but because logic as a discipline is concerned with the structures or principles of thought; these structures of thought have no continental boundaries. We, for sure, can apply the principles of logic to different socio-cultural situations, but we have no peculiar regional thought processes. The point here is that in deducing the enculturation of logic from the enculturation of philosophy, we must realize that enculturation of philosophy does not reduce philosophy to culture, and, indeed, while enculturation emphasizes the particularity of philosophy, attention is drawn to the universality of philosophy: the different cultures, into which philosophies are inserted, imbue the various philosophies with a relativistic character. These cultures individualise those philosophies. But the “unity of human nature” stipulates “the universality of philosophy.”⁴⁸

Although Okere’s position (and that of other African universalists, like Wiredu) appears to anchor our position on the universality of logic, we are only committed to it to the extent that it shows that the enculturation of philosophy is not tantamount to the reduction of philosophy to culture. We are indeed hesitant to accept a universalist approach to philosophy; this is because unless it is underscored that African cultures may be different from those of the West in important ways that deserve to be highlighted, they would be misrepresented by beginning from a presumption that cognition in Africa and the West are essentially the same. In fact, as Hallen points out, “If the issue is cognition, of course the key question becomes just how different it has to be in order to be rated as qualitatively distinct.”⁴⁹ Again, there is the further consideration that, in the past, supposed “differences” in African cognition were sometimes used as evidence that Africa’s indigenous intellectual

⁴⁸ T. Okere, “The Relation between Culture and Philosophy,” p. 11.

⁴⁹ Barry Hallen, “Not a House Divided,” *Journal on African Philosophy*, 2003, no. 2.

heritage was thereby inferior to, or less advanced than, that of the West. This is one important reason, Hallen again points out, that African analytic and hermeneutic philosophers of a relativist persuasion have devoted so much time and effort to clarifying what they believe to be the accurate depiction of cognition in the African context. Further, unless we develop a coherent system of African philosophy, Africa would have nothing that is distinctively African and yet has inter-cultural significance.

This hesitance, it must be made clear, does not apply to logic; for logic is contrived, albeit conventionally, as a branch of philosophy in its true essence; it is a tool (an organon, to use Aristotle's terminology), a propaedeutic to philosophy. What this means is that logic is an essential facility of inquiry and, as such, lies at the head of a ramified hierarchy of knowledge; it is like a laser, a tool whose best use is not illumination, but rather, focus. A laser may not provide light for your home, but, like logic, its great power resides in its precision.⁵⁰ The import here is that the philosopher uses the tool of logic to organize reality and render it intelligible; this explains why logic and mathematics work so well together: they are both independent from reality and both are tools that are used to help people make sense of the world. Logic's location in philosophy is thus because it is a method for comprehending the underlying structure of reason. Indeed, Aristotle invented logic as method for comprehending the underlying structure of reason, which he saw as the motor that propelled human attempts to understand the universe in the widest possible terms. Thus, philosophy relies on logic to help provide explanations for what we see. The significance of this explanation is that logic, by its propaedeutic role, is not native to philosophy alone; indeed, all the various specialized disciplines rely on, and do, indeed, apply, logic for their research objectives, assumptions, proceedings, and conclusions.⁵¹ This explains why we said that logic deals with the structures of thought.

⁵⁰ U.O. Uduma, *Logic and Critical Thinking: A Study of Impediments to Good Reasoning and Guide to Sound Argumentation* (Abakaliki, Ebonyi State: Willey Rose and Appleseed, 2008), p. 42.

⁵¹ U.O. Uduma, *Modern Symbolic Logic* (Enugu: Pan Afric Publishers, 2004), p. ix.

The Universality of Logic

Etymologically, the English word “logic” comes from the Greek word “*logos*,” usually translated as “word,” but with the implication of an underlying structure or purpose – hence, its use as a synonym for “God” in the New Testament *Gospel of John*. This etymological consideration does not, strictly speaking, illuminate the nature and subject matter of logic; it, however, gives some rough insight into why logic is often defined as *the principles of correct reasoning*. One thing to note, however, about logic roughly seen as the principles of *correct* reasoning, is that studying the correct principles of reasoning is not the same as studying the psychology of reasoning. Logic as a discipline deals with the former; it tells us how we *ought* to reason if we want to reason correctly. Whether people actually follow these rules of correct reasoning is an empirical matter, something that is not the concern of logic.⁵²

The psychology of reasoning, on the other hand, is an empirical science. It tells us about the actual reasoning habits of people, including their mistakes. A psychologist studying reasoning might be interested in how people’s ability to reason varies with age. But such empirical facts are of no concern to the logician.

One might ask, so what are these principles of reasoning that are part of logic? There are many such principles, but the main (not the only) thing that we study in logic are *the principles governing the validity of arguments* – whether certain conclusions follow from some given assumptions. For example, consider the following three arguments:

If Nnanna is a philosopher, then Nnanna is a great thinker.
Nnanna is a philosopher.
Therefore, Nnanna is a great thinker.

If Nnanna is taller than Onyeka, Nnanna is taller than Enyinnaya.
Nnanna is taller than Onyeka.
Therefore, Nnanna is taller than Enyinnaya.

If Nigeria wins Mali, then Nigeria will not be eliminated at the preliminary stages.

⁵² U.O. Uduma, *Logic and Critical Thinking*, p. 2.

Nigeria wins Mali.

Therefore, Nigeria will not be eliminated at preliminary stages.

These three arguments here are obviously good arguments in the sense that their conclusions follow from the assumptions. If the assumptions of the argument are true, the conclusion of the argument must also be true.

Two features about the rules of reasoning in logic are illustrated in the above arguments. The first feature is its *topic-neutrality*. As indicated in the arguments, the same principle of logic can be used in reasoning about diverse topics. This is true of all the principles of reasoning in logic. The laws of biology might be true only of living creatures, and the laws of economics are only applicable to collections of agents that engage in financial transactions. But the principles of logic are universal principles which are more general than biology and economics. This is, in part, what is implied in the following definitions of logic by two very famous logicians, Gottlob Frege and Alfred Tarski: "To discover truths is the task of all sciences; it falls to logic to discern the laws of truth...I assign to logic the task of discovering the laws of truth, not of assertion or thought."⁵³ "[Logic...[is]...the name of a discipline which analyzes the meaning of the concepts common to all the sciences, and establishes the general laws governing the concepts."⁵⁴

A second feature of the principles of logic is that they are *non-contingent*, in the sense that they do not depend on any particular accidental features of the world. Physics and the other empirical sciences investigate the way the world actually is. Physicists might tell us that no signal can travel faster than the speed of light, but if the laws of physics had been different, then perhaps this would not have been true. Similarly, biologists might study how dolphins communicate with each other, but if the course of evolution had been different, then perhaps dolphins might not have existed. So, the theories in the empirical sciences are contingent in the sense that they could have been otherwise. The principles of logic, on the other

⁵³ Gottlob Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry," *Mind* 65, no. 259 (July 1956).

⁵⁴ Alfred Tarski, *Introduction to Logic and to the Methodology of Deductive Sciences* (Oxford: University Press, 1963), p. xi.

hand, are derived using reasoning only, and their validity does not depend on any contingent features of the world.

For example, logic tells us that any statement of the form “If P then P ” is necessarily true. This is a principle of the second kind that logicians study. This principle tells us that a statement such as “if it is raining, then it is raining” must be true. We can easily see that this is indeed the case, whether or not it is actually raining. Furthermore, even if the laws of physics or weather patterns were to change, this statement would remain true. Thus, we say that scientific truths (mathematics aside) are *contingent*, whereas logical truths are *necessary*. Again, this shows how logic is different from the empirical sciences like physics, chemistry or biology.

Logic, as we can see, is concerned with correctness of argumentation. Once we identify the subject matter of logic as arguments, it becomes clear that logic lies at the heart of human existence; human life is directed by argumentation. This applies to the African as it applies to all cultures. Arguments thus mean reasoning, and the African’s ability to conduct his daily affairs ordinarily means that he is eminently logical. Even the most irredentist of those who deny the existence of African philosophy, more precisely, the existence of African logic, are agreed that all the main processes of inference known to modern man are deployed in African traditional thought either in the maintenance of the established world view or in its elaboration or modification – though they add that such processes are deployed in an essentially unreflective manner. The universality of logic is, thus, admitted even by the irredentists. “Horton does not deny that traditional people do not reason and do use logic...He does insist that they do so in a non-reflective, non-critical manner. Which would mean that such societies generally are not conscious...of the logical structures, qua logical structures underlying their discourse.”⁵⁵ And like Hallen, one cannot but ask: what is the transition that must be undergone in order for a process of thought to be regarded as critical or reflective? One notices here that Horton’s qualification is forced; it is a deliberate introduction to sustain, as it were, the distinction between the “civilized” and “uncivilized,” the “superiority” of Europe and

⁵⁵ Barry Hallen, “Robin Horton on Critical Philosophy and Traditional Thought,” *Second Order: African Journal of Philosophy* III, no. 1 (1977), pp. 81-82.

“inferiority” of Africa. After all, it takes only some sort of training for one to be conscious of logical structure qua structure. Even among the so-called superior race, only those trained in logic can claim consciousness of logical structure qua structure. Horton’s distinction is, thus, vacuous or, at best, superfluous.

The universality of logic means that logic is a fundamental dimension of human personality, and when we assert this, all we are saying is that all human experiences are organized, analyzed and sustained by a certain intrinsic constitutive element. This element has a logical nature since it guarantees a homogeneous systematic and ordered conception of reality. It is the logical element which coordinates and transforms fragmentary perceptions, concepts, words, emotions, and judgements, etc., into a recognizable human act. This is why it is said that logic is a disposition to fundamental ordered action and, hence, a characteristic of self-conscious and responsible humans endowed with reason. It is in this sense that Momoh submits that the competent individual in any society is logical.⁵⁶

Against Cultural Logic

When we say that logic is universal, we are committed to the view that logic is an element in and of culture.⁵⁷ In saying this, what is meant is that the cultural experiences of a people cannot be meaningful unless they are organized or coordinated in language, an activity which itself presupposes a logical ability; logic and language are fundamental or central to organizing reality and, thus, a characteristic of all human societies. In other words, the cultural experiences of a people are embedded in human language, and language itself is the immediate translation of the logical world of the individual in a manner concretely recognizable. That is, logic is what makes language possible; the existence of culture presupposes the existence of logic. The assertion as to the existence of logic in all cultures does not, however, mean that logic is cultural in the sense that there are regional or cultural logic(s).

⁵⁶ C.S. Momoh, “The Logic Question in African Philosophy,” in C.S. Momoh, ed., *The Substance of African Philosophy* (Auchi: African Philosophy Projects Publications, 2000), pp. 186-192.

⁵⁷ See U.O. Uduma, “Logic as an Element of Culture: In Defence of Logic in African Traditional Thought,” *DRUMSPEAK: International Journal of Research in the Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2009), pp. 167-190.

Yet, it is by defending a cultural logic that Etuk and Ijioma, as already highlighted, argue for a peculiar African logic. For example, for Ijioma: "If logic is a part of philosophy and...philosophy is culture bound, it follows necessarily that logic is culture bound,"⁵⁸ and for Etuk, the "implicate" of domesticating and enculturating philosophy "will be that there has to be an African logic, if there is African philosophy."⁵⁹

Etuk, it is clear, was reacting to Horton's assertion that Africans, instead of employing intuition and ideas, have a rich proliferation of the sort of thinking called *magical*, from which he concludes that, in traditional Africa, "people do not stop to ask what are the irreducibly basic processes of inference, or how they can be justified." Etuk submits that "philosophers know the centrality of the role of logic in the study of philosophy" and went further to ask whether we are "now going to suggest that there could possibly be logic in superstition and myths and folk-tales and oral traditions and religious rituals which are common features of Africa." He, of course, admits that, while not accepting this in the "crude sense," that is the reason he canvasses for a peculiar African logic.⁶⁰

While paying due sympathy, indeed, positive consideration, to the exigencies that prompted cultural identity, we nevertheless canvass for a transcending of jingoism in arguing for a particularistic logic. It is failure to do this that forces Etuk, and with him, all those who canvass for the regionalization of logic, to confuse the socio-cultural application of the principles of logic with the nature and structure of logic. Thus, in talking of whether or not there can be African logic in the sense of a peculiar African structure of logic, it is our position that there is none. This is so because logic is universal with no continental boundaries. We, for sure, can apply the principles of logic to different socio-cultural situations, but we have no peculiar regional thought processes. Yes, we talk of Chinese logic, Buddhist logic, Polish logic, etc., but these qualifications only indicate the kind of logical studies that are developed in China, by the Buddha, and in Poland; they do not denote logic in China or Poland, just as Aristotelian logic does not denote a logical structure peculiar to Aristotle. Of course, we do not talk of American logic,

⁵⁸ C.O. Ijioma, *Modern Logic*, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Udo Etuk, "The Possibility of African Logic," p. 100.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

German Logic, and British logic as we talk of American philosophy, German philosophy, and British philosophy. We, therefore, should be concerned with what to contribute to the world growth of logic, rather than dissipating energy arguing for a peculiar African logic.

It is, thus, not surprising that Nze, in his assessment of William Amo, argues that “Amo was an African but there was nothing African in his syllogism, language and criticism except Amo the African philosopher.”⁶¹ For Nze, and plausibly so, the application of the principles of logic does not regionalize logic.

In illustrating the universality of the principles of logic, the claim that the “Law of Non-contradiction,” also called “either-or” logic, is exclusively western logic, while eastern philosophy uses something called the “both-and” logic, has been shown to be misleading and patently wrong. In *Proven Western Logic vs. Flawed Eastern Logic*, the story is told of a Christian apologist, author, and native of India, Ravi Zacharias, who travels the world giving evidence for the Christian faith. Following a presentation on an American campus regarding the uniqueness of Christ, Ravi was assailed by one of the university’s professors for not understanding Eastern logic. During the Q&A period, the professor charged, “Dr. Zacharias, your presentation about Christ claiming and proving to be the only way to salvation is wrong for people in India because you’re using ‘either-or’ logic. In the East we don’t use ‘either-or’ logic – that’s Western. In the East we use ‘both-and’ logic.” Ravi, in rebutting the rather confused but insistent professor, asked, “Are you saying that when I’m in India, I must use either the ‘both-and logic’ or nothing else?”⁶²

Ravi added, “Even in India we look both ways before we cross the street because it is either me or the bus, not both of us!” Indeed, the either-or does seem to emerge. The point of illustration is that “everyone who tries to argue against the first principles of logic winds up sawing off the very limb upon which they sit,” that one cannot deny the law of contradiction without running into difficulty. It makes pungent the point that structures of thought are not

⁶¹ Chukwuemeka Nze, “Amo on Logic, Language and Criticism,” in T.U. Nwala, ed., *Anton William Amo’s Treatise on the Art of Philosophizing Soberly and Accurately* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publ., 1990), p. 22.

⁶² Alleywayzalwayz, “Proven Western Logic vs Flawed Eastern Logic,” *Canadian Content* (2009).

regionalized; they are, rather, universal. This is made unarguable by saying, "Imagine if the professor had said, 'Ravi, your math calculations are wrong in India because you're using Western math rather than Eastern math.' Or suppose he had declared, 'Ravi, your physics calculations don't apply to India because you're using Western gravity rather than Eastern gravity.'" We would immediately see the folly of the professor's reasoning.⁶³

The stress, thus, is that, notwithstanding the lure of particularism, things work in the East just like they work everywhere else. In India, just like in the West, buses hurt when they hit you, $2 + 2 = 4$, and the same gravity keeps everyone on the ground. The structures of thought are the same for the West, the East and the African.

For sure, there could be peculiar cultural African experiences where the principles of logic can be applied. The argument that the Igbo aphorism "ahu nze ebie okwu"⁶⁴ reflects a peculiar African logical structure is patently wrongheaded. Etuk, in discussing status factor as a peculiarly African logical structure, tries to insinuate that Modus Ponens does not hold in African application of logical structures.⁶⁵ This is not true. What it admits, at best, is that Africans accept that contradiction does not have the meaning of absurdity. In this sense, Africans are more inclined to the dialectical conception of logic where everything is mediated and, therefore, everything is itself and, at the same time, not itself. This suggests that dialectical logic is one area where African cultural experiences will contribute to the world growth of logic. Africans must not bother themselves about formulating artificially regulated logistic languages. Logic is not exhausted in formal logic; indeed, formal logic is only a tiny aspect of logic. The over emphasis on this tiny aspect of logic, it is no doubt, is where the problem lies. We thus need to be reminded that, the world over, we do not know of people who subject thinking to the regulated language of symbolic logic before knowing when someone is logical. There is, indeed, no peculiar African logical structure. Thus, although Etuk talks of affective logic being

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ See Cletus Umezina, "Proverbs as Sources of African Philosophy," in J.O. Oguejofor and G.I. Onah, eds., *African Philosophy and Hermeneutics of Culture: Essays in Honour of Theophilus Okere* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2005), pp. 246-259.

⁶⁵ Udo Etuk, "The Possibility of African Logic," p. 112.

peculiarly African, one only appreciates it as both an extrusion and extension of Leopold Sedar Senghor's idea that the logical framework of the African was different but equal to that of Europeans and consisted of emotion rather than abstract reason. This is to say that affective motor is peculiarly African. For sure, Africans can work on developing affective logic, but that would not make it a peculiarly African category any less that deontic logic is peculiarly European. Even if it is called African logic, that does not make it the logic of Africa, but only a kind of logical study which is mainly developed in Africa. Likewise, as we have already pointed out, the expression "Polish logic" has never been used to denote logic in Poland, but a kind of logical study which are mainly developed in Poland. We are, thus, reminded that, to argue for a peculiar African logic is to unwittingly argue – and this would be monstrous – that Africa has a different or peculiar system or systems of thought from the rest of the world.

3.

Intercultural Philosophy, Africa's Predicament and Globalization: Finding the Missing Link¹

DOROTHY U. OLU-JACOB

Introduction

The idea of finding one's missing link (as well as the behavioral attitudes deriving from it) is not new to humanity. As far back as the 5th century B.C, the Athenian philosopher, Plato, had to declare that "the individual is not self-sufficient but has many needs which he cannot supply by himself."² He was followed by Aristotle who declared that man is a political animal whose nature is to live in a state. This idea was so important to Aristotle that he asserted further that "anyone who by nature or simply by ill luck has no state is either too bad or too good, either sub human or super human...he is a non cooperator like an isolated piece in a game of draughts."³ Further, in the attempt to find a solution to poverty in his dialectic of

¹ *Abstract:* That the world has become a global community is no longer an issue. What has become an issue is that in the midst of this globality exists a paradox. This paradox consists in the clash between cultural identity and cultural diversity. Against the backdrop of particularism, which the vanguards of interculturality are said to pursue, this paper examines the essential ingredients of intercultural philosophy with a view to showing how this approach can be employed by African philosophers in addressing the pressing issues of contemporary Africa. The thesis of this paper is: in light of the interdependence and intensification of inter-relations within the globe, no culture, African or non-African can remain shut up in its cocoon or operate as a windowless monad because the globalizing dynamics call for mutual complementarity and enrichment. It argues that within the universalizing phenomenon of globalization, Africa can find its missing link through interculturality. This will not only enable African philosophers to reflect and interpret other cultures but also appropriate what has enabled other cultures to excel in order to transform the African condition.

² Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Desmond Lee (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 117

³ Aristotle, *The Politics*. Trans. T.A. Sinclair (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), pp. 59-60

civil society, G.W.F. Hegel affirmed that self-interest, which motivates activity in civil society, can only be realized through interaction with others. He succeeded in justifying colonial expansion by asserting that “contradiction (poverty) in civil society compels society to push beyond its boundaries and seek markets and so its necessary means of subsistence in other lands, which are either deficient in the goods it has over-produced or else generally backward in industry.”⁴

If one relates this idea of finding one’s missing link and lack of self-sufficiency to globalization and thematic issues in intercultural philosophy and Africa’s predicament, one cannot but conclude that the observations of the previewed philosophers were apt. Elaborately, the tendency of all peoples to band together, a strategy by means of which each unit attains full self actualization or finds its missing link in a relationship of assumed mutual complementary intimacy is at the heart of globalization; it is also true of the domain of intercultural orientation with its tendency to emphasize different philosophical templates, their differences and complementarity, continuity and discontinuity and the resulting mutual enrichment of different traditions in philosophy.

It is the aim of this paper to investigate the idea of missing link as it pertains to intercultural philosophy and globalization. It examines the idea of intercultural philosophy with a view to showing that this approach can be employed by African philosophers in addressing the pressing challenges of contemporary Africa. The paper argues that, within globalization, Africa can find its missing link through interculturality. It is the position of the paper that the intercultural approach will not only enable Africans to reflect on and interpret other cultures but also help her engage in critical self examination that will transform the African condition.

Intercultural Philosophy: An Exposition

In terms of intercultural philosophy, it would be very common to ask whether cultures interact; and whether such interaction, if it is possible, can take place on the basis of equality. The answer to the first question is definitely yes. To the second question, one can also

⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*. Trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), p. 110

say yes but history has given us sufficient reason to assert that cultures do interact but not always on the basis of equality.

The contact between western imperialism and Africa was such that the imperialists considered their ways to be the best and only way (the ideal), which must replace the mode of life of the natives. This formed the basis of their effort to change the mode of life of native Africans and remold them in the image of Europe. The French were quite brash about it as witnessed in their colonial policy of assimilation, which entailed making the African as much European as his dark skin would allow. The early missionaries saw it as a divine assignment and were ready to risk death for it. Charles P. Grove gives a deep insight into what transpired:

The early missionaries, in other words, came as censors of the Africans: and in preaching their ideals, the emissaries of the gospel were usually fortified by the unquestioning belief not only in their rightness, but also in the depravity of so many indigenous institutions. Tribal collectivism, the power of spirit mediums, witchcraft beliefs and ancestral worship had to go for all were impure. The African had to become a new man. In order to bring about this spiritual regeneration, the early missionaries were willing to risk incredible hardships and death.⁵

It is clear that what happened between the imperialists and Africa was a case of two cultures interacting but not on the basis of equality. It is evident from Grove's account that the attempt to retool the minds of Africans and change their values was informed by the fact that, to many Europeans at that time, what was uniquely African was short of the ideal and inconsistent with what they considered to be rational and true – and that happened to be European values.

The German idealist, G.W.F. Hegel, one of the apologists of colonialism, had as far back as the nineteenth century, in his *The Philosophy of History*, taken absolute spirit on an itinerary from the East to West proclaiming that "the East is the beginning of history

⁵ Charles P. Grove, "Missionary and Humanitarian Aspects of Imperialism from 1870 to 1914," in L.H. Gann and P. Duignan, eds., *Colonialism in Africa 1870–1960, Vol. 1* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 488

while the West is the end.”⁶ In an attempt to enthrone European values as the universal and the ideal, Hegel contrasted four cultural realms in terms of their degree of consciousness of freedom. Africa south of the Sahara desert was written off as a “non-historical part of the world,”⁷ which had no self-consciousness to exhibit but rather “has remained for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world, shut up; the land of childhood enveloped in the dark mantle of night exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in him.”⁸ It emerges that the effort to remold Africans in the image of Europe was borne out of perceiving European values as superior. This was incompatible with dialogue.

Terms such as dialogue and polylog are central to intercultural philosophy championed by Heinz Kimmerle and Franz Wimmer respectively. It is a framework that sees philosophy as being culturally bound and affirms that communication is possible between different philosophical backgrounds. Exponents of this viewpoint contend that contemporary philosophizing is dependent on a variety of cultural frameworks and that philosophy originated not only in Europe but elsewhere,⁹ including Africa, as well as America, Asia and Europe.

In this respect, many philosophers can validly speak of their works in reference to their own context or culture, consequently giving birth to such nomenclatures as African philosophy, Asian Philosophy or Indian philosophy. What this means is that diversity of philosophies focusing on their similarities and differences for the purpose of the mutual self examination that ensues in mutual enrichment is preferable.

The basic question of intercultural philosophy as Wimmer has couched it is this: “how can philosophy, which can never be expressed independently from linguistic and conceptual tools coming from particular languages and cultures aim to provide us

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Dover Publications, 1956), p. 103.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹ F.M. Wimmer, *Is Intercultural Philosophy a New Branch or a New Orientation in Philosophy?*, Online at <https://homepage.univie.ac.at/franz.martin.wimmer/intpheng95.pdf>, p. 1

with answers which are intended to be universally true or valuable?"¹⁰ For Wimmer, "intercultural orientation means to be aware of the multitude and diversity of the many cultures of humankind...[and he asserts that such an orientation] aids our argumentation not to recede in relativism [since such ways] will be found in cooperation rather than separation."¹¹ Flowing from this, one may be right to say that interculturality proffers the framework for diverse cultures to find their missing links in mutual complementarity as opposed to domination.

Reflecting on the central theme of intercultural philosophy, Kimmerle and Vincent Shen agree that it is inadequate to do philosophy through the peephole of Western philosophy and that every culture has its specific type of philosophy, which deserves equal treatment. Kimmerle exposes the characteristics of interculturality to consist in the fact that it is guided by the methodology of listening, equality and difference simultaneously, and openness with respect to possible results of the dialogues.

Intercultural philosophy has attracted a number of invectives, namely that such regional intellectual cultures are antithetical to the goal of philosophy as a scientific enterprise. The critic further says that upholding dogmatically one's culture will yield to results that are partisan.¹²

Allied to this is the view that intercultural philosophy celebrates the relativity of concepts and methods, which runs counter to the character of philosophy as a comprehensive and universal subject. Innocent Asouzu highlights the problems that intercultural philosophy is likely to encounter, as the vanguards pursue philosophy in a non-binding, non-centrist manner, to include unintended ethnocentrism, prejudice and the danger of simplification where some seek to impose their ideas unduly.¹³ The dangers pinpointed by Asouzu can be avoided if those engaged in intercultural understanding realize that the activity provides a forum for finding one's missing link and that mutual cooperation implied

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid*., p. 11.

¹² S.B. Oluwole, "Culture, Nationalism and Philosophy," para. 5. Online at <http://www.galerie-inter.de/kimmerle/culture.htm>.

¹³ Innocent Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology*, Vol. 2 (Zurich: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2007), p. 40.

by dialogue rests on synergy amongst the stake holders. With this in focus the fear or danger of ethnocentrism is dissipated.

Dialogue is essential to intercultural understanding. Dialogue involves the unity of action and reflection of the dialoguers for the purpose of transforming and humanizing the world.¹⁴ It presupposes that the participants in the dialogue recognize each other as equals and abhors the imposition of the truth of one person on the other; it is not an instrument for the domination of one culture or person by another. Humility also characterizes dialogue, and this requires that no party in the dialogue should consider himself as the owner of truth or be closed or offended by the contribution of others. Clearly, self sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue. What we have are individuals who are attempting together to learn more than they now know.¹⁵ Take, for instance, Socrates. As a dialogue philosopher, he never approached any dialogue session claiming any superior knowledge to the interlocutor. He made it clear that he knew nothing. The outcome of the Socratic dialogue is that each of the respondents went away with a much improved state of knowledge than he was in before the dialogic engagement.

Thus, dialogue presupposes an open mind, acknowledgement of other possibilities or alternatives besides one's own. This overrides the bigotry and fanaticism that ethnocentrism begets. Relativism has little or no room to manifest in this connection. Mutual enrichment and self actualization are likely benefits of intercultural philosophy through the instrumentality of dialogue. It is from this perspective that this paper looks at globalization and Africa's predicament.

Africa's Predicament and Intercultural Philosophy

Take a look at the African continent starting from Nigeria to Liberia, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, Sudan, Chad, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ethiopia to Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Somalia. One will see a continent beleaguered by poverty, disease, wars, abuses of office and corruption. In spite of its population, Africa's contribution to global GNP ranks the lowest. She also ranks the lowest when it comes to such development indicators

¹⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd. 1972), pp. 61-62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

as life expectancy, child mortality rate, health and so on. Littering the political landscape are cases of poor governance where African rulers mismanage their economies, become dictators and put their personal interest above the nation.¹⁶

With all the debits in its economic and political balance sheets, Africa is adjudged to be the poorest and the most misgoverned continent in the world.¹⁷ The current mood is that of despair and marginalization.

Explanations concerning the causes of this problematic situation abound as well as suggested antidotes. But the reality is that the continent remains in a quagmire. This, calls for self-reflection and analysis of the problems and critiques of practices that have brought Africa to the present situation as well as a proper engagement with the culture or philosophy that will help in the development of Africa.

Historically, interculturality has impinged on events in Africa. African scholars who went abroad for professional training returned to apply and adapt the ideas they garnered from their host cultures within the context of African experience. This informed the assorted philosophies for Africa that became popular in the early days of independence, such as African socialism of Kwame Nkrumah's genre, Pan-Africanism, Black consciousness and the conceptualization of negritude and its assorted interpretations in the writings of Aime Cesaire and Leopold Sedar Senghor. Their existential and social analysis utilized the conceptual schemes and ideas of continental philosophies for reflecting on African conditions at that time, which included the colonial situation and the challenges of the newly independent states.¹⁸ In what follows, this paper highlights the various areas in which interculturality can be applied.

Peace and Security

¹⁶ P. Comey, "Pan African Union: So far So Good," *New African*, July 2004, p. 14.

¹⁷ S. Odunuga, "Failure of Governance and conflict in Africa," J.O. Oguejiofor, ed., *Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa* (Enugu-Nigeria: Delta Publications Nig. Ltd. 2004), p. 177.

¹⁸ W.L. van der Merwe, '*African Philosophy' and the contextualization of Philosophy in a Multicultural Society*. <http://www.fineprint.com>. Downloaded 1/2/2010, p. 3.

Recently, peace and security are allied terms that have become a matter for concern for the generality of Africans. There is a need for African philosophers to analyze the different meanings of human security in accordance with different cultural perspectives. This intercultural approach opens up a window for one to learn from different traditions of peaceful resistance and resolution developed in different cultures throughout the world and history. This step is necessary given the assorted skirmishes and violence cutting across the length and breadth of Africa.

Poverty

Similarly, interventions that consider poverty issues from an intercultural perspective will not only expose how poverty and wealth are perceived, defined, and expressed in different cultures of the world, but also appropriate these conceptions and meanings if different from ours within the immediate context of African societies. This approach will analyze the political economies of different local cultures with a view to evaluating their successes and failures. At the same time, the different strategies for reducing poverty will come into focus and be evaluated with a view to learning from their strategies for arresting increasing poverty. This will take into consideration cultural knowledge and perspectives, promoting the exchange of experiences among groups of the poor around the globe.

Corruption

Is corruption peculiar to Africans? Or does the difference between Africa and Europe concerning corruption lie in style? What accounts for the relatively low level of corruption in Europe and North America? Is the stereotype that the African is corrupt through and through true? Intercultural knowledge regarding how different cultures in Europe and the North and others where corruption is minimal is imperative in deconstructing whatever myth people may have regarding leadership and acquisition of wealth. It will also help one to learn what strategies and mechanisms have been adopted and put in place by these other cultures in order to deal with the plague called corruption over the years.

Colonialism

Did Africa pass through colonial experience? The answer is yes. What about China and India? The tendency is to blame colonialism for all the things that went wrong in Africa. But the reality is that Africa's predicament can be explained by a number of variables, not just colonialism. The question now is: What did the other nations do to overcome the shortcomings of colonialism? The antidote is to build Africa into an equally strong continent by looking inward and at the same time access other world systems through dialogues.

Globalization, Intercultural Philosophy and Africa

It is germane to indicate from the outset that judgments and conversations organized around the relationship between globalization and cultural diversity are diverse and paradoxical. Globalization is said to represent a great danger to diversity, and at the same time, cultural diversity is perceived as a positive reality at the service of globalization. Globalization is a process characterized by the intensification and expansion of economic, political, cultural and environmental interrelations across the globe. The interconnection and flows resulting from this make many existing borders and boundaries irrelevant.¹⁹ This process is facilitated by accelerated information technology that has turned the world into a global village as a result of which the world has experienced as never before a constant and large-scaled cultural encountering.

In discussing intercultural philosophy in the context of globalization, the central question that needs to be addressed concerns whether or not globalization does always involve a greater degree of communication or exchange among different cultures and civilization in the world on equal footing. There are fears that it displays the tendency to impose one of these cultures on others and will ultimately create a homogenous model that affects them all. Cultural homogenization is an outlook that tries to downplay specific cultural traits in an attempt to force these to fit into the preferred culture. This may happen in a situation where we have immigrant populations being compelled to fit into the existing cultural norms of the host country in order to gain acceptance. Cultural homogenization is incompatible with intercultural

¹⁹ M.B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 7.

philosophy. But there is also the hope that the intensification of exchange and communication, which globalization engenders among individuals and cultures, ensues in mutual enriching. For instance, 'regionalized globalization', which allows the adaptation of globalization to particular geo-cultural situations, gives room to cultures operating within the region to find their missing links in economic, political, cultural and environmental terms.

This immediately brings into focus the issues that are thematic to Africa's predicament. As already noted, the cultural contact between the Western imperialists and Africa was unilateral. Africans suffered a crisis of identity due to this encounter. Many authors have argued that the deep economic crisis the continent is experiencing today can be explained in terms of that contact. It marked a turning point in the social, economic and political fortunes of Africa. The interaction ought to have been driven by the idea of missing link, as reflected in Lord Lugard's *Dual Mandate*.²⁰ Instead, African culture was denigrated and its wealth exploited. Poverty and technological backwardness are some of the effects of the colonial policies in Africa. This was done by killing all initiatives by Africans at creativity and subsequently reducing Africans to consumers rather than producers of technology. Many detractors would say that Africa was already poor before the colonial invasion. One's response in this regard is that before colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade had depopulated Africa and transported its able-bodied young men and women across the length and breadth of Europe and the Caribbean. These could have been the work force needed to develop the African continent politically, economically, technologically and socially.

In contemporary times, a theory of international trade that offers both Africa and the West to find their missing links in mutual complementarity is the Ricardian concept of comparative advantage. It states that if a country does not have an absolute advantage in the production of a commodity, it can still benefit from international trade by specializing in the production and export of the commodity in which it has the least disadvantage or in which the country has a comparative advantage relative to the other. Or, the country can

²⁰ This claim is made by Emmanuel C. Eze, in *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

import the commodity in which its absolute disadvantage is greater. This is the area of its comparative disadvantage.

Clearly the concept of comparative advantage embodies the idea of the West and Africa finding their missing links in mutual complementarity. But in reality, the idea is violated in favour of the West. What Ukandi Damachi *et. al.*, have noted in their *Development Paths in Africa and China*, is quite enlightening. According to them:

There was the long established theory of comparative advantage that told a country that even though there was no product in which it had absolute advantage, it could still benefit through international trade by exporting to another country the product in which it had the least disadvantage, while the theory of course applied *mutatis mutandis* to the other country. But no industrialized country seemed willing to accept goods on this basis. Trade continued to be in those tropical agriculture products or materials in which the poor countries' advantage is absolute. When as in textiles, they demonstrated their ability to compete, markets were closed by tariffs, quotas or embargoes.²¹

The above is a confirmation of what has already been said, that the industrialized nations have applied the concept of comparative advantage to their advantage but to the detriment of African countries. While the industrialized nations find their missing links, African countries are denied access to opportunities for finding theirs. Many African countries are labor and land abundant. Some are mineral abundant while almost all are lacking in capital abundance. What this parochial interpretation of the theory of comparative advantage means is that trade will be limited to land-abundant commodities – wood, timber, cotton, cocoa, groundnut, rubber and other raw material and mineral outputs – while all capital abundant outputs will be imported from Europe.

The dominant development paradigm so far pursued by Africa is the Eurocentric paradigm that subjects goods and services to the law of supply and demand in a competitive market place. There is a

²¹ Ukandi Damachi, G. Routh, and R.E. Ali Taha, eds., *Development Paths in Africa and China* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 2.

need for African countries to band together. It is in this connection that the formation of the African Union makes sense. At the same time, the Pan African ideals of Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kaunda and Toure, should be revisited, for they are relevant in getting the African continent out of its present quagmire. Pan-African pursuits must include salient features of the knowledge and ontological systems of indigenous Africa in its vision of Africa's future. In pursuant of the Pan-African vision, African countries should look inward and pull together their un-integrated economies. Once a position of strength is achieved, African countries can interact with others, not as junior partners but on the basis of equality through dialogue.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the idea of intercultural philosophy, Africa's predicament and globalization. It tried to argue that the possibility of Africa finding its missing link lies in the intercultural orientation. To realize its main objective, the paper tried to trace the idea of missing link with a view to showing that this idea has always been embedded in the writings of previous philosophers. Subsequently, it highlighted the themes of intercultural philosophy. This prepared the ground for its application to Africa. Having exposed the dynamics of globalization, the paper proceeded to examine intercultural philosophy in the context of globalization. From the exposition done herein, one asserts that the identity of the African has greatly been distorted by the contact with the West.

On the basis of intercultural dialogue in the globalizing world, it is hoped that there will be an orientation towards establishing genuine symmetrical exchange and communication among different cultures and civilizations. In such a world, all cultures will have a voice and a vote. Following this, the ethnocentric approach (which means our way is the best) and the parochial approach (which means our way is the only way) will be jettisoned. What should be embraced is the synergetic approach, which allows us to manage diversity in the context of interculturality. The synergetic approach offers the opportunity for cooperation and complementarity that is mutually enriching and enables Africa to find its missing links.

The way out for the African continent is to look inward and analyze the issues at stake as this pertains to its development efforts. It should engage in dialogue with others that have had similar

experience. This way, it will not only explore what has enabled these other cultures to excel but also learn from their experience what can be used to transform the African condition.

Part III
Cultural Ontology and Social Organization

The Ontological Basis for the Failure of Liberal Democracy in Africa: A Phenomenological Rescue¹

JOSEPH N. AGBO

Introduction

Democracy has become the catchword of our age, the refrain of our ever-echoing political symphony, and the brandished cutlass wielded before 21st century African leaders. It is the most popular word within the African socio-political environment. In Africa today, the slogan to all states and nations is “liberal democratize or face doomsday.” In Africa, we are told that the opposite of liberal democracy is doom and gloom. The relationship between democracy and development in Africa is exalted to the status of indispensability. It is argued that democracy, especially the liberal variant, is a condition *sine qua non* for the development of society. However, this argument is historically and existentially invalid, especially when recourse is made to the “Miracle” of the Asian Tigers (South Korea,

¹ *Abstract:* Twenty years ago, when the former Soviet Union broke up into 15 Republics, Francis Fukuyama, then a Policy Analyst in the U.S. State Department, announced to the world an “end of history” and the “universalization of Western Liberal Democracy as the final form of human government.” This paper observes that the obvious failure of the liberal democratic alternative in Africa should not be sought in Politics but in Ontology. It argues that the abstract individualist ontology of liberal democracy does not fit into the social, other-directed world-view of African societies. It further notes that the traditional communalism of most African societies makes the fostering of liberal democratic ideals a palpable dream. The paper further argues that the only thing liberal democracy has done in Africa is to (sometimes) provide a peaceful atmosphere for imperial and monopoly capitalism. The paper observes that Liberal Democracy cannot be in such a sordid state in its Western birth place and then expect to be a huge success in Africa. The paper concludes with a request to liberal democracy to do two things if it must have *real* success in Africa: one, to adopt the phenomenological attitude; and two, to change the entities that make up its ontological world from “individuals” to “citizens.” For until individuals are conceived and perceived as (or become) citizens, Liberal Democracy would continue its “dark-groping” in Africa.

Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore) and Japan. Besides, when one remembers how the Fadhs of the Saudi Kingdom are sitting on an over 12 million barrels daily production of the Black Gold (crude oil), and western liberal governments are not telling them to “democratize or be doomed,” one sees a big gulf between democracy and development.

However, this paper is not concerned with the ambivalence between democracy and development. It argues that the reason for the obvious failure of liberal democratic experiments in Africa should not be sought in politics, economics, or democratic institutions. It is to be located within the domain of ontology. If democracy would succeed in Africa, our contention is that it is not the liberal variant that would. This is because liberalism arose from a particular conceptual scheme and the wholesale attempt to export its political version (democracy) to Africa has met with failures because of the very entities that make up the liberal ontology – individuals.

Since the appearance in mid-1970s, of what Samuel P. Huntington called “the third wave of democratization,”² African States have, in a desperate attempt to get “financial handouts” from Western countries, put up one laughable attempt after another all in a bid to be baptized with “democracy.” This is what is known, within ontological discourse, as Abstract Individualism. From a display of the importance of an ontological grounding of any reality, this paper would proceed to carry out a critique of the abstract individualist ontology of liberal democracy.

In the course of this paper, we shall also try to establish the relationship between Liberalism and Democracy. We will also attempt to characterize what we consider to be the ontological world of the African which makes the hoisting of an individualist ontology chequered, at best, and impossible, at worst. This is why Adolfo Ahumada, in his *A History of Western Ontology*, says that “ontological ideas are a significant reflection of the state of the culture which produces them.”³ Our analysis in this paper may appear sceptical, cynical or even nihilistic of the democratic ideal; but a more discerning reader would discover that our concern is to ensure that

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977).

³ Adolfo Ahumada, *A History of Western Ontology* (Washington: University Press of America, 1978), p. vi.

democracy itself concentrates on pursuing *goals* and eschewing shadow-boxing with *phantoms* and *utopias*. Paul Glenn says that ontology satisfies the inner desire of the human mind for “unified knowledge and a clear view of reality in a various and complex universe.”⁴

This paper will conclude by establishing that what liberal democracy needs is the phenomenological attitude, both in the conception of its goals and aspirations as well as in its attempt to “export” itself outside its birthplace. We believe that the freedom (liberty) and equality (or equity) that democracy gives itself the gargantuan task of articulating, are our universal human values. We, therefore, must understand how these values are conceptualised and expressed within each culture, so as to engender intercultural dialogue from within our differences. This is why in his paper, “Catholic Philosophy and The Dialogues of Religions and Culture: The Global Challenge,” Edward J. Alam notes that attention or preoccupation with *Being* (or what he calls, the “North Star”) is a “gift” and the best option we have if we must not lose sight of “*the Good, the True and the Beautiful*.”⁵ He captures our inevitable and indispensable need for the ontological in the following words: “[T]o continually ask the metaphysical question, the question of Being, prevents us from being totally lost.”⁶ It is, therefore, this need to keep on our track, to correctly navigate through the murky waters of our polity, to avoid our losing touch with the *foundation* that makes our ontological investigation into democracy a social philosophical necessity.

The Priority of Ontology

The quickest and easiest answer usually given to the question, “What is ontology?” is to retort that “ontology is the study of *being-itself*.” This answer, though correct, is too simplistic because of the equivocal and ambiguous meaning of the word “being.” In his paper, “Appraisal of African Concept of Being,” Christopher M.

⁴ Paul J. Glenn, *Ontology* (London: B. Herder Book Company, 1945), p. 10.

⁵ In Edward J. Alam, ed., *Christianity, Culture and the Contemporary World: Challenges and New Paradigms* (Lebanon: Notre Dame University Press, 2009), p. 83.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Okoro⁷ observes that in most European languages, the concept of being is known by simple translation of the meaning of one to its equivalent in another language. Okoro, however, laments that it is not so easy to study “being” in any African language or thought because of the initial absence of a literary culture or tradition in Africa, south of the Sahara. But our interest in his paper is especially given a fillip by his contention that “individuals’ or peoples’ concepts or notions of being or reality are the hearts of their philosophies and that there cannot be any philosophy without its peculiar concept of being or ontology.”⁸ That all peoples must have a *peculiar ontology* is incontestable!

We shall not bother ourselves with the age-long concern or contest between metaphysics and ontology, for while some consider ontology as a branch of metaphysics, others think that ontology is more fundamental. It is interesting to note that most ontological investigations have not been carried out ontologically, as it were. Except for ancient philosophy, we need to note that most of the ontological interests and commitments are carried out according to the philosopher’s or period’s own priorities. Quine, for example, directly attempts to rehabilitate metaphysics as ontology through the tools of predicate logic.⁹ No wonder, as Ahumada puts it succinctly, that “in many ways, the history of ontology is the history of philosophy.”¹⁰ Whether we are aware of it or not, whenever we ask the question “what is X?,” ontology is our demand. This is why in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger asks the question of why there is “Something” instead of “Nothing,” and goes ahead to aver that “only as phenomenology is ontology possible.”¹¹

In an ontological enquiry, etymological consideration may not be very helpful, but we would still do well to analyse the word “ontology” etymologically. The name “ontology” is a combination of two Greek words, “on” (stem, “ont-” combining form, “onto”), which means “being,” and “Logos,” which is a compound word

⁷ In *Philosophy and Praxis* 4 (2008).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁹ W.V.O. Quine, “On What There Is,” in *From A Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Ahumada, *A History of Western Ontology*, p. vii.

¹¹ Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 60.

meaning “science.” Thus, literally speaking, “ontology” means “the science of being.” Glenn defines ontology as: “the science of being as such and of created being in its fundamental classifications and its causes...it is the very heart of philosophy, because it searches out the very deepest reasons for each point of its doctrine...Being is reality and reality is whatever exists or can exist, the existible.”¹²

Here, Glenn not only tells us that ontology is the science of *being*, he goes ahead to tell us that being is *reality*, while reality is the *existible*. Ontology is so fundamental to any philosophy or act of philosophizing. Aristotle was right when he called it “First Philosophy.” So when we talk about the priority of ontological grounding, we mean, by “priority,” not simply, and not only, the state of *coming before* others in position or rank; we mean, in addition, that this *something* needs *attention or consideration before* others. This reason informs our interest in the ontological foundation of (liberal) democracy.

In “The Limits of Ontological Analysis,” Panayot Butcharov says that ontology has two fundamental tasks: “the account of the *ultimate sorts* of entities and the account of the ultimate *unity* of complex entities.”¹³ For an illustration, the question, “what is democracy?” – if it must have any ontological status at all – is not a question of the *causes or effects* of democracy, or of the *laws governing* the democratic ideal or institutions. It is not even a question of the *history and future* of democracy, amongst others. Rather, it is a question of *democracy itself*, of those logically necessary and sufficient conditions under which democracy can be identified or identifiable, that is, identified as an existent. When we get down to real analysis, however, we shall discover that a discussion of the ontological foundation of democracy would not be the same as, for example, an enquiry into the ontological status of *meaning*. Democracy is a tested socio-political reality and so it will lose its basis if it is not discussed as such. On the other hand, we are not trying to create an ontology for democracy where none exists. This is an ontology that is both *a priori* and concrete. It is *a priori* because it is conceptualized independent of any facts of experience.

¹² Glenn, *Ontology*, p. 3.

¹³ In Larry Lee Blackman, ed., *Classics of Analytical Metaphysics* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), p. 140.

Conversely, it is also a “concrete social ontology” located in space and time, realizing that “if we undervalue ontology, we obstruct the development of thought (reality).”¹⁴ And to summarize our discussion on the priority of ontology, let us end with this quotation from Glenn. He says that “all the sciences presuppose ontology, and while they have completeness in their own respective spheres, they are like buildings without foundations or like objects floating in the void unless they are grounded or moored upon the solid ultimate reality which ontology investigates.”¹⁵

Which Democracy Is “Liberal”?

The relationship between liberalism and democracy is a very curious and interesting one. When one considers which came first in Western civilization, it is easy to answer “democracy.” Although, historically considered, democracy preceded the liberal attitude in Western civilization (at least, “democracy” is traced to the city-states of Athens), Bhikhu Parekh notes that “in the modern period, liberalism preceded democracy by nearly two centuries and created a world to which the latter had to adjust.”¹⁶ We know that the direct, village-square democracy of the city states of Athens could not suffice the needs and challenges of the large modern nation-states! The main challenge which confronts us in our attempt to conceptualize liberalism is how to move from its ordinary usage to its philosophical interpretation. This is because there are so many “liberals” all over the place, especially in Africa, who only remember the word during elections, but neither understand what it means nor live out whatever meaning they understand.

Maurice Cranton, in his “Liberalism” contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, quotes Jean de Crandvilliers, a French theorist, as lamenting “how the word ‘liberalism’ is perverted with those who treat it as synonymous with individualism. We can only

¹⁴ Bogliolo Luigi, *Metaphysics*, trans. Myroslaw A. Cizdyn (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1987), p. 113.

¹⁵ Glenn, *Ontology*, p. 9.

¹⁶ Bhikhu Parekh, “The Cultural Particularity of Liberal Democracy,” in David Held, ed., *Prospects for Democracy* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 152.

reply by giving the word its true meaning."¹⁷ One can understand that Crandvilliers' fear here is that the words "liberalism" and "individualism" are not (semantically) *synonymous*. But this lack of a semantically synonymous relation should not gainsay the fact that both have a definite political relationship. This is because the liberal world is really conceived as a world of *free individuals*, while "individuals" are the only *entities* that liberalism says make up its world. And exploring this relationship between individualism and liberalism, Pierre Manent, in his paper "On Modern Individualism," writes that "the development of modern *individualism* has not been a triumphal march, no matter how victorious *liberalism* might seem today."¹⁸ Liberalism carries with it a doctrine of individual rights which are expected to be a "no-go-area" for the state (Lockean) if individuals are to be seen as *free* or which the state, as created and accepted by the individuals, is expected to bequeath these rights to the individuals (Rousseauesque).

But where can we find, in Crandvilliers' words, the "true meaning" of liberalism? Will etymology help us in this search? Can the dictionary help us? How much insight-lending can an anthology of liberal writings give us in this search? The point being conveyed is that *liberalism* as a concept carries with it a baggage of diverse meanings, for "liberalism" is a movement, an attitude, a philosophical doctrine, a theory, and an ideology. As a movement in religion, it is associated with Protestantism; as a theory in economics, it is bound up with free enterprise (capitalism) or *laissez-faire*; as a political philosophy, it celebrates the essential goodness of man and reiterates the autonomy of the individual in the pursuit of his goals and desires. Brian Barry, in his *Political Argument*, notes that although classical liberalism had other strands, it has essentially to do with the "idea that the state is an instrument for satisfying the wants that men happen to have rather than a means of making good men (e.g. cultivating desirable wants or dispositions in its

¹⁷ In Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Vols. 4-5, p. 459.

¹⁸ Pierre Manent, "On Modern Individualism," *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 1 (January 1995), p. 5.

citizens).¹⁹ These “wants,” as observed above, may be religious, economic, political, or simply psychological.

We do not think we should lament or see as a “horror of philosophical analysis” the fact that it is difficult or impossible to give any concept a definite meaning. Walter Lipmann says that “when any of the meanings is put to a practical test, almost invariably we have to turn to other meanings to correct its deficiencies.”²⁰ According to Ken Jowitt, in “The New World Disorder,” “liberal ideology asserted a new social ontology in which the individual was the basis for social identity and responsibility.”²¹ The individuals within the liberal democratic experiment combine to form another abstract class – the people. But who are these “people,” who are the foundation of political power, but who, paradoxically, suffer the misuse of this same power? Jacques Barzun, in his paper “The Theorem of Democracy,”²² notes that the phrase “the people” has been so much extended that its meaning has changed beyond recognition since the 19th century industrial revolution as well as the 20th century social revolution. This change “beyond recognition” makes them almost ontologically non-existent, and to give sovereignty to “the people” is to give it to nobody. This is why Barzun says that “if the people are sovereign, they can do anything they want, including turn their constitution upside down. They can lose their freedom by choosing leaders who promise more equality, more prosperity, more national power through dictatorship.”²³

Thomas Pangle, for example, observes that answers to liberal and democratic questions have become “philosophically thin and ontologically non-existent.”²⁴ Liberalism, therefore, seems to have placed a historical constraint on the democratic ideal, which leads to the burgeoning of the latter and which has elicited for it so many critics. Can we remove these constraints without undermining the

¹⁹ Brian Barry, *Political Argument* (repr., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 66.

²⁰ Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (New York: The Mentor Books, 1955), p. 111.

²¹ In Larry Diamond and Mark F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 251.

²² In *Dialogue*, Feb. 1990, no. 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁴ Thomas L. Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 3.

basis for democracy itself? That appears to be an imperative question that is of imperious necessity. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis have noted:

The walls that liberalism erects do more than create liberties; they also obscure and shelter the citadels of domination. According to its usages, liberty is held to apply to rational Agents (choosers) but not to others (learners) and the norms of democracy are held to apply to the actions of choosers in the public realm alone.²⁵

The conceptual imbroglio involved in attempting a definition of democracy makes us think about the possibility of democracy itself. In other words, we are interested in answering the question “What is democracy?” in terms of whether it can really exist. Although democracy was originally a political term, it has become extended to include (in addition to its being a system of government) a state of affairs, such that we can talk about a *democratic* “state of affairs” in economics, religious matters, academics, companies, and even in the family. The development of the concept of democracy ran into an historically-determined irony – for, despite the eulogy heaped on the Athenian type of democracy, it has been heavily rejected through historical evolution, especially with the size of nation-states.

Rousseau,²⁶ for instance, saw the Athenian type of democracy as too pure for men and so only fit for gods, while James Madison saw the same Athenian democracy as intolerant, unjust and unstable. Both men, therefore, advocated the *representative* variant of democracy. This conceptual problem of clarification of the meaning of democracy has led to suggestions by some analysts and theorists for a change of name: Fredrick Hayek suggested that democracy’s new name should be *demarchy*,²⁷ while Robert Dahl favours *Polyarchy*.²⁸ Laszek Kolakowski, in his paper, “The Uncertainties of a

²⁵ Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), p. 17.

²⁶ J.J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s Books, 1978).

²⁷ Fredrick von Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 3: p. 38.

²⁸ Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

Democratic Age,"²⁹ also makes a distinction between democracy and what he calls *Ochlocracy*, the rule of the mob. But democracy, according to Keith Graham, "is not a proper name like 'Fred' to be bestowed by baptism on anything one likes,"³⁰ noting that its philosophical principles are a nexus of complicated *logical* connections.

The "popular sovereignty," which represents its practical application, cannot be said to embody it, in entirety. Democracy, says Pierre Rosanvallon in his paper "The History of the Word 'Democracy' in France," is a way of being for Society,³¹ but it is not just being (existing) as only an idea, that is, only as an essence present in the mind. That would make democracy's *beingness* to be a *logical* one. An essence can be re-present (by representation) in the mind which knows it, only if it is first and foremost present in the thing which it constitutes.

Ontologically, liberal democracy accepts that individuals are the entities of the social world. However, the *practical* (as distinct from the *ontological*) existence of democracy has been questioned by Marxists, for example, on the ground that as a system of government it must always be committed to one particular set of interests, and Marxists locate this in the conflict which exists in the economic means of production. Secondly, democracy has also been dubbed "impossible" because people in general do not want the responsibility that it carries. Paul K. Padover quotes Simon Bolivar, for example, as lamenting that "it is a terrible truth that it costs more strength to maintain freedom than to endure the weight of tyranny."³² A third reason for democracy's "impossibility" or "impracticability" is that it is said that the system makes demands for qualities which ordinary men cannot possibly be expected to possess. S.I. Benn and R. Peters, in their monumental book *Social Principles and the Democratic State*, discuss these arguments in Chapter 15, captioned "Democracy."

From what we have said so far, we can see that it is liberalism with its concomitant individualism that defines the ontology of

²⁹ In Diamond and Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, p. 322.

³⁰ Keith Graham, *The Battle of Democracy* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1986), p. 9.

³¹ In *Journal of Democracy* (Oct. 1995), pp. 140-145.

³² Saul Padover, *Sources of Democracy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. xxvi.

liberal democracy. David Held holds that there is no simple one institutional form of liberal democracy. He insists that "contemporary democracies have crystallized into a number of different types, which make an appeal to a liberal position vague at best."³³

If we really want to be sincere to ourselves, we must admit that it has become both practically and conceptually difficult to identify what is and what is not democracy. There is really no definition that can capture the vast scope and long history of the term "democracy." It has been argued that the relationship between liberalism and democracy is essentially paradoxical and ambivalent. For example, David Beetham, in his "Liberal Democracy and the Limit of Democratization," calls liberal democracy "a Portmanteau construct,"³⁴ arguing that just as the various parts of a portmanteau are fixed together in order to achieve some kind of wholeness, so liberalism and democracy had to be, strangely as it were, fixed together. Similarly, in Benjamin Holden's book *Understanding Liberal Democracy*,³⁵ the argument is set forth to the view that there is a paradoxical relationship between liberalism and democracy. Also, in Alfred Arblaster's popular book, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*,³⁶ an historical exploration of the ambivalent relationship between liberalism and democracy is explored, especially in chapters 10, 11 and 15.

The import of all these is to argue that there is nothing sacrosanct about liberal democracy, and that democracy does not have to be "liberalized" in order to get a hearing. In fact, our argument is that when exporting liberal democracy to Africa, the West was more interested in exporting "liberalism" than she was in exporting "democracy." As a matter of fact, the Western world won't mind if Africa "liberalizes" without "democratizing," because it is the former that would make capitalism and Protestantism plantable and nurturable within Africa's economic and religious environment!

³³ David Held, ed., *Prospects for Democracy* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 14.

³⁴ In Held, ed., *Prospects for Democracy*, p. 56.

³⁵ Benjamin Holden, *Understanding Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Philip Allen, 1988).

³⁶ Alfred Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

What's Wrong with Abstract Individualism?

The concept of *Individualism* has gone through a network of changes since the emergence of the individualism of Hobbes, Locke, and the founding fathers of the "American Dream," notably Benjamin Franklin. And this historical point is imperative here because what we regard as "individualism" today has not always been as complicated as it is now conceived or conceptualized, especially with the advent of the postmodernist fervour in philosophy and politics.

We can still remember the "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" life of the individual in the "State of Nature," as captured by Thomas Hobbes. In this kind of precarious state of being, the individual had to join civil society in order to escape this unfortunate fate, and to secure his natural rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Robert D. Putman, in his paper, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," asks if it is not paradoxical that "the concept of 'civil society' has played a central role in the recent global debate about the preconditions for democracy and democratization,"³⁷ and yet this globalization has been championed by liberal democracy with what Manent regards as its emphasis and presupposition "that the individual is the only source of legitimacy."³⁸

However, it is worth clarifying here that the individualists are not denying the existence of either the state or civil society. Rather, the claim is that individuals are ontologically prior in existence to the latter. And so it is to this ontological grounding of the individual that any critical scrutiny must turn. But before this can be done, let us see how Adam Wolfson captures this Hobbesian, Lockean, and Franklinian conception of individualism. In his paper, "Individualism: New and Old,"³⁹ Wolfson says that Franklin dressed his conception of individualism in bourgeois virtues. For him (Wolfson):

As originally conceived, an individual curiously lacked what we today might call "individuality." He shared the same origins as his fellows (the state of nature), the

³⁷ In *Journal of Democracy* 6, no.1 (January 1995), p. 77.

³⁸ Manent, "On Modern Individualism," p. 7.

³⁹ Adam Wolfson, "Individualism: New and Old," *The Public Interest*, Winter 1997, no. 126.

same basic rights (liberty, life, property), desires (comfortable self-preservation), and the same virtues (principally, industry and frugality). This was the stuff on which civil society was to be built.⁴⁰

The above conception of individualism obviously sees the individual as a “finished product” who has to perceive the State, the body politic, the Community, the Social, etc. as only *necessary additions*. But John Dewey grounded this conception of individualism. In his book, *Individualism: Old and New*,⁴¹ Dewey provided a metaphysical objection to the Franklinian conception of individualism. He posited a “group-minded individual,” insisting that individuality is not something ready-made and “given” with natural “laws.” For Dewey, it is the society, with its laws (though man-made), that conditions and shapes the man. The old individualism – with its concomitant virtues of industry and frugality – has been rendered unfeasible and moribund by the machine age, corporatism, and international capitalism. This “ultra-social” conception of individuality made the critics of the 1950s characterize the individual in various terms. David Riesman, in *The Lonely Crowd*, uses “other direction,” while Erich Fromm, in his book *The Fear of Freedom*, characterizes them with the phrase “marketing orientation.” Of course, one should not forget Herbert Marcuse’s concept of the administered “individual” or the “one-dimensional man.”

But the view that the individual is ontologically prior to society cannot be said to be an *historical* fact. It is neither something that happened at a particular point in history nor something that is happening “now” (in the sense of “these times”). Every individual begins life, not as an autonomous, encapsulated, solitary, and distinct individual, but as a socially-conditioned person. Parekh has explored and elucidated the inner structure of liberal democracy with an assessment of the validity of the Universalist claim made on its behalf. For him, “Individualism is at the heart of liberal thought and shapes its political, legal, moral, economic, methodological,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

⁴¹ This analysis of Dewey is provided by Wolfson, “Individualism: New and Old,” pp. 31-32.

epistemological and other aspects."⁴² And for him, because liberalism has an historical emergence in the West, "liberal democracy" is specific to a particular cultural context, and so any claims of universal validity made on its behalf ought not to be accepted. For Parekh, therefore, "Liberal individuals seek to run their lives themselves...since they necessarily begin life as socially-conditioned beings, their goal is gradually to recondition themselves, to become ontologically transparent, to reconstruct and recreate themselves, and thus to become autonomous and self-determining."⁴³

From this, it is not difficult to observe that the liberal individualist world is a world of "pure rationality," where no serious attention is paid to emotions. It is, in fact, the way liberalism situates individualism that makes freedom such an elusive good, because the liberal world is a world of "perfect liberty" where the individuals can do as they please. Our liberal individual, born into and with his social skin, imagines he could jump out of that skin!

Carol Gould⁴⁴ has observed that the "abstract individualism" ontology of liberal democracy is characterized by the fact that it abstracts particular properties of individuals and persons; it sees individuals as equal in their basic liberties and rights; it conceives individuals as existing independently of each other and related to themselves only externally. But she rejected this ontology on the ground that "the uniqueness of individuals, which consists in their differentiated qualities and capacities, is not accidental to their individuality, and it is just this particularity of Real individuals that abstract individualism fails to capture."⁴⁵

A second ontological objection given by Gould to this sort of individualism is that this ontology disregards the concrete social differences among individuals. Thirdly, individualist ontology conceives individuals as isolated egos; and, lastly, individuals are conceptualised as having a "given" or fixed nature.⁴⁶

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴⁴ Carol C. Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economics and Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-96.

It is also important to mention here the postmodernist outlook, which has exalted socialization above any attempt at autonomy or individualism, considering the latter as a pipe dream. We use the view of one of the greatest exponents of postmodernism (in philosophy), Richard Rorty, to state this position. The Rortian rejection of anything like a “true core-self” provides another revolution in the conception of the meaning of individualism. In his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*,⁴⁷ Rorty observes that there is no such thing as a “character reserve” to which the individual could fall-back on. This is what he calls the “liberal ironist,” and, with this, he drives a wedge into any conception of absolute individuality. Says Rorty: “There is no such thing as inner freedom, no such thing as an ‘autonomous individual’...there is nothing deep inside each of us, no common human nature, no built-in human solidarity...There is nothing to people except what has been socialized into them.”⁴⁸

This is vintage Rorty, the post-modernist who would reject any attempt to privilege reality upon any grand, universal, transcultural scheme. This is not a rejection of the goal of autonomy as advocated in the 19th and 20th centuries. What Rorty and his colleagues claim is that “autonomy” is not what human beings have within them, like blood or water in the body; but according to Adam Wolfson, “autonomy is something which certain particular human beings hope to attain by self creation, and which a few actually do.”⁴⁹

As the world becomes more and more a “global village” through communication and civilization, with democratic nations entwining the globe in a network that will ensure a better relationship, there is yet, according to Manent, “in the life of the mind in these nations, efforts in the realm of literature and perhaps, in that of art more generally, to undo or ‘deconstruct’ all human relationship.”⁵⁰

The implication of this irony is that there is nothing in our ontological reality which makes us “separate,” or distinct, or places us in a world-of-our-own compartmentalization. It appears to be something that exists only in our *minds*, our mouths and in the pages

⁴⁷ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴⁹ Wolfson, “Individualism: New and Old,” p. 87.

⁵⁰ Manent, “On Modern Individualism,” p. 5.

of books. In other words, the conception or idea of individualism, which grounds these liberal democratic initiatives, is not an ontological reality but only a logical one, for it depends on the mind. No wonder Ghia Nodia, in his paper, "Rethinking Nationalism and Democracy in the Light of Post-Communist Experience," avers that "atomistic individualism divides the community."⁵¹

The implication of the foregoing is that if individualism came under a hammer even within its Western birth place, it is even worse if it is exported wholesale; and when this "exporting" is to Africa of all communal places, we clearly see why the liberal democratic alternative is not working (and may perhaps never work) in Africa! This is why Nodia raises the following questions: Are "the conditions and mechanisms of emergence of democratic model in the first place the same as preconditions and mechanism of its dissemination? Is the relation between liberal and democratic principles the same in 'home-bred' and 'imported' democracies?"⁵² What Nodia calls "conditions" here is what interest us, for it is the "ontological constitution" of a people that creates the conditions under which they live.

There has been an undemocratic way of "exporting" liberal democracy because the culture of liberalism that defines the democracy in question is alien to Africa. Next, we shall try to articulate the world-view of the African.

Is Africa's Communalist Ontology Disputable?

Our contention that the failure of liberal democracy in Africa issues from fostering or imposing the individualist ontology on Africa, with communitarian ontology, faces a task here because of two problems: one, the conceptual problem of how to articulate the meaning of "communalism"; two, the problem of whether "communalism" is exclusive to Africa. Another way of stating the second problem is to ask whether communalism is an essential ingredient in the definition of an "African" or in constituting "Africa"! But it does not mean that the African denies individuality; it only means that the African gives primacy to the "other," the

⁵¹In N.V. Chavchavadze et al., eds., *National Identity as an Issue of Knowledge and Morality* (Washington D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), p. 50.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 42.

“social,” the “community.” In fact, it appears that for the African, “community” means “comm-unity”; that is, “Come, Let’s Unite.”

Without getting into unnecessary sophistry and bizarre hermeneutic analysis, we believe that we all have an idea of what “community” means, from where “communal” is derived and from where “communalism” sprouts. According to Kwasi Wiredu, in his paper “Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of Some African and Western Conceptions of Morals,”⁵³ African morals are “communalistic” in the sense that the interests of the individual need to be adjusted to those of the society. He proceeds to say that “when the Akan [an ethnic group in Ghana] or in general, the African traditional social outlook is described as communalistic, it is usual to contrast it with that of Western society by calling it individualistic. There is a certain obvious anthropological validity in this comparison.”⁵⁴

If communalism has a certain degree of “anthropological validity” to the African, we argue that, at this point, anthropology and ontology collapse. For if the African is anthropologically communalistic, then he is ontologically communalistic. The social or associational expression of communalism is obvious to anyone that lives or has lived in a traditional African setting.

As far as we are concerned, the export of *democracy* was the export of *liberalism*. The individualism, with its concomitant selfishness, consumerism, capitalism, and the I-Me-Mine-Myself philosophy that is at the core of political liberalism (or democracy) looms larger than life in today’s urbanized and industrialized Africa. Joseph O. Eneh says: “The African self adopts what C.B. Okolo terms, ‘we-existence’ and ‘I-existence...The ‘I-existence’ is not in the fashion of the Western notion of egoistic, utilitarian and individualistic living which favours extreme selfishness and greediness. The individual is not marginalized but he fulfils himself more in community.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Kwasi Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy, 4 Essays by Wiredu*, selected and introduced by Segun Oladipo (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1995).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Joseph O. Eneh, *Introduction to African Philosophy and Thought* (Enugu: Satellite Press Ltd., 1999), p. 15.

One does not need to be a seer to see what politicians in Africa are doing in the name of democracy, while the so-called established democracies watch in awe. Of course, they only get involved when crises burst on the heels of the various (s)elections organized to throw-up another set of leaders. And of course, this “involvement” is for the purpose of protecting their imperialistic investments. Liberal democracy was exported to Africa, and it has assumed the position of a new Ethics, a new Civilization, a new Morality. A look at the politicians in Africa would reveal how they tower above the so-called “people” as “iroko” trees. Instead of being servants, they are lords alienated from the same people they are supposed to serve. They build mansions with the people’s money, buy air-conditioned cars with tinted glass, shutting themselves in and shutting the people out. And then the people, who are used to going directly to their Chiefs, Igwe, Oba, Emir, etc., to lay down their problems, are alarmed at the behaviours of these MPs and Executives. They steal the funds meant to develop the society, send their children to Europe or the Americas to get a good education, and travel abroad to get medical attention when they are sick. The money they stole is equally used to buy up people-focused corporations – all in the name of privatization.

Taking his departure from Obi Oguejiofor’s “How African is Communalism?,” Ike F.H. Odimegwu, in his paper, “How Communalist is Africa?,”⁵⁶ discusses the issue of communalism from an historical or periodical perspective. He admits that the African traditional setting was essentially communalistic. He sees Communalism as

the spiritual communalism of a society; the spirit of being one community, of being one with one’s community, of belonging fundamentally to one another and to the community...communalism would advocate a basic disposition to altruism, a tendency to consensus and a characteristic philanthropic attitude.⁵⁷

Foisting a liberal democratic ontology on this altruistic, other-directed ontology is like trying to cover a round pot with a square

⁵⁶ In *Philosophy and Praxis* 3 (2007).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

pot-cover. Try as we can, the cover can't roundly cover the pot in its square shape, and so, we are left with dropping the square cover on top of the pot, in a desperate bid to get the pot covered. But do we know that the steam from the pot-on-fire would, sooner than later, blow the cover away? That's why liberal democracy in Africa is gasping for breath.

African communalism respects and honours the individual only in terms of his relationship and contribution to society or community. It is within the community that the individual is defined and accepted; it is the society that gives him the ontological primacy on the basis of which he formulates his epistemological outlook to reality. The Community, Society, and State do not exist to satisfy the individual's needs. The individual in Africa is, not because he finds himself in a community of individuals but because he finds himself with individual-in-community. That politics in Africa today is do-or-die is because Africans are seeing their fellow men and women, whom they should stand with and by, standing aloof like the Shakespearian "Colossus."

The fact that there is relative peace in the so-called established democracies is not because they do not have problems within their polity but because they shouldn't really bother if anyone pursues self-interest, since it is the dominant ontological schemata. According to Wiredu:

Industrialization seems to be proving deleterious to the system of communal caring and solidarity which was a strong point of traditional communalism, and one of the greatest problems facing us in Africa is how to reap the benefits of industrialization without incurring the more unlovable of its apparent fallouts, such as the ethic of austere individualism.⁵⁸

It is not the individualization that is a problem, but the variant that sees reality from only, and as only, the individual's perspective, and Wiredu has rightly characterized it as "austere"!

Wiredu, in another paper, "Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity," laments the problem fostered by the majority. He also criticizes the impact of

⁵⁸ Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy*, p. 45.

party politics in Africa and, therefore, votes for a non-party polity in Africa. For him, the non-party, consensual democracy in Africa will solve the problem of ethnic minorities whose dissent has been the major cause of crisis and political instability. For him, under this system, “governments are not formed by parties but by the consensus of elected representatives. Government, in other words, becomes a kind of coalition – a coalition not, as in the common acceptance, of parties, but of citizens.”⁵⁹ He emphasizes that it is easier to secure a decision via majority than via consensus, noting that the latter was the hallmark of traditional African politics: “The elders sit under the big tree, and talk until they agree.”⁶⁰ One only needs to read Chinweizu’s *The West and the Rest of Us*⁶¹ to realize that the liberalism that the West peddles like drugs, and as a universal culture, is peculiar to the West.

Walter Lippmann (1889-1984) published his book, *The Public Philosophy*, in 1955, and diagnosed what he called “a sickness of the Western Liberal democracies.” And in his “Democracy as an Ethical Problem: Philosophy of Politics and Community,” Claes Ryn⁶² captures what is of interest to us from Lippmann in the following words:

The heart of the democracy problem was for Lippmann the erosion of the public philosophy, a development that has continued in the decades since he published his book. One result is the further unleashing of partisanship in various forms and the fragmentation of society. Without a widely shared and deeply rooted sense of society’s higher end to moderate the self-indulgence of individuals and groups, government has become more and more the servant of clamouring pressure groups.⁶³

This is the Waterloo of the liberal world view, where the interests of individuals and groups of individuals are exalted above

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-70.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶¹ Ibekwe Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us* (London: NOK Publishers, 1978), pp. 241-242.

⁶² In N.V. Chavchavadze, *et al.*, eds., *National Identity as an Issue*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

that of the society or community. But in Africa, we try to achieve a consensus by listening to and spending time to weigh all the interests. This type of ontological perspective is certainly averse to liberalism. Using land ownership in contemporary Africa as an example of the aberration in Africa today, Ike Odimegwu writes: "In contemporary Africa...land is now individually owned, purchased, surveyed, bounded and possessed."⁶⁴ What Odimegwu says here is, of course, anti-communal, and it was fostered by the liberal ontology.

In another conceptualization, Odimegwu develops his concept of "Integrative Personhood"⁶⁵ as a consistent and authentic result that can be gleaned from the African communalistic world view. Gliding through the inconsistencies, contentions and difficulties encountered in an attempt to conceptualise and comprehend communalism, he seems to have identified and articulated the following as indispensable to any serious cognition of communalism: Unity of Being, Community of Existence, Familyhood, Openness, Commitment and Cooperation, and Good Name. It would be a search within the "Bermuda Triangle" to attempt to seek these virtues within an ontology defined by individualism. Odimegwu, in his characteristic poetic (and sometimes unfamiliar/difficult diction), captures the relationship between communalism and integrative personhood, in the following words:

Integrative Personhood is the dialogic presencing of being whereby, to be is to become and to become is to integrate. It is the phenomenon of the infinite tendency of the human being whereby the conceptual signification of the I-thou relation is not the mere passivity of the collectivist I-with or Being-with of atomistic substance-individualities, not the individualist self-exalting "being-there" of existentialist ontological foundation, but a "being-unto" that manifests in an I-unto-thou which is also a thou-unto-I, characterized by projective futurity and interactive reflexivity.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ike Odimegwu, "How Communalist Is Africa?" *Philosophy and Praxis* 3 (2007), p. 6.

⁶⁵ Ike Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood: A Communalist Metaphysical Anthropology* (Zurich: Lit Verlag Gmb H & Co. KG Wien, 2008).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

A Phenomenological Ontology of Democracy

At this point, we face the task of establishing the link between ontology, democracy, and phenomenology. We have so far been dealing with ontology and democracy, and by the time we sketch our understanding of phenomenology, we would discover that a true democrat must need to be a phenomenologist. Of course, the idea of a phenomenological ontology is Heideggerian, for in Heidegger's view, phenomenology is the only method or tool for ontological investigation.

This paper is essentially focused on the claim that liberal democracy is not working in Africa because of her communalistic ontology. Our conception of "citizens" as replacement for "individuals" cannot really be discussed here. For "citizens," as an alternative ontology, is not for "liberal democracy" *per se*, but for democracy *as such*, that is, for democracy that is not preceded by any adjectives. In my paper, "From Abstract Individualism to Citizenship: Resolving the Paradox of Democracy Unadjectivized,"⁶⁷ I have laid out the outline of this position. Of course, the paradox of democracy is that with adjectives (liberal, social, pluralist, majoritarian, constitutional, plebiscitary, military, proletarian, strong, etc.) preceding every conception of democracy, any and every political system can masquerade as democracy. Yet without any adjectives, democracy qua democracy would be a hollow, ungraspable concept.

The crux of my argument in that paper was arrived through a phenomenological conception of the consciousness of "citizens of..." A citizen is always characterized and defined by belonging to a collective – a place, a society, a state, a community, a privilege that "individual" does not have. I argue that liberalism had to jettison the concept of "citizen" that was the underlying foundation of the pre-liberal conception of democracy. I stated the kernel of my argument in the following words:

The "individual" by definition is "single; separate; a single human being"; but the "citizen" is "person who has right as a member of a country; person who lives in

⁶⁷ Joseph N. Agbo, "From Abstract Individualism to Citizenship: Resolving the Paradox of a Democracy Un-adjectivized" (unpublished).

a town or city; the citizen of..." The mention of the word "citizen" immediately conjures within the conscious mind, the idea of a "citizen of..." Just like in the phenomenological attitude, consciousness is always consciousness of...something, the consciousness of citizen is always citizen of...someplace. This is an acknowledgement or portrayal of the "other," whether in terms of a "state" or a "country," and the citizen realizes that he forms an organized political unit with the state or society, for the state is nothing but a politically organized society. The question of a conflict or tension between the citizen and the society (state or country) neither applies nor arises because the citizen is defined or conceived on the ground that he belongs to an object – in this case, a particular state or society. For just like in phenomenology, objectivity is meaningful only in relation to subjectivity, the idea of "citizen" is bound by necessity to a belongingness to a particular social order.⁶⁸

The implication of this argument for our current discussion is that it becomes obvious that a "citizen" is more useful to communalist or collectivist or associationalist ontology. Any democracy that must be meaningful for the African must see itself and its participants in "citizen-terms" rather than in "individual-terms." In other words, democracy-itself (in conception and exercise) must adopt the phenomenological attitude if it is to achieve goals and eschew utopia. Liberal democracy must drop the "liberal" content if it wants to transcend (successfully) its particular Western birthplace, and then establish a stronghold in Africa.

The doctrine of intentionality sees consciousness as other-directional, for consciousness is always consciousness of something and this "something" is what the subject "intends." The implication of this is that objectivity can only be intelligible or meaningful in relation to subjectivity, and that things are meaningful only for us, that is, for Man. But, while Husserl's phenomenology emphasizes the intentional operations of consciousness, Heidegger connects his

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

understanding of phenomenon with the concepts of *Being*. For Heidegger, in addition to other objects of *ontic* (empirical) experience, such as “death,” “anxiety,” “care,” “freedom,” “guilt,” etc., there is the fundamental “thing” which demands elucidation and which is revealed by them: the *ontological* structure of the *Dasein*. It is at this point that we arrive at Heidegger’s phenomenology as ontology, for he subjects ontology to phenomenological scrutiny. For Heidegger, philosophy can only be understood as ontology, and the only *method* of ontological enquiry is phenomenology, while the fundamental *object* of phenomenological research is *Being-itself*. As noted by Edie M. James *et. al.*, Heidegger’s contribution to philosophy, and especially to phenomenology, “lies in his notion of experience-of-the-world (in-der-welt –sein). It is no longer merely consciousness which is intentional (as for Husserl) but the *Dasein*, human reality as a unitary whole, as a field.”⁶⁹

From our foregoing discussion, we notice that phenomenology, like pragmatism or existentialism, is open to all kinds of human experience, including the experience of freedom and equality – two pillars of democracy. There is no *phenomenon* (phenomenologically speaking) that lies outside phenomenological analysis. We notice that the principle of individuation is embedded in the abstract individualistic ontology of liberal democracy, and this relates to the phenomenological view that consciousness is always intentionally directed at something. The *closed* selves (individuals) of liberal ontology would render freedom unattainable because the so-called “open society” would be (conceptually) impossible to conceive.

Another reason why the phenomenological attitude is pertinent to this paper can be traced to both the inner development of democracy itself, as well as to the “export” of its liberal variant. Democracy should not see itself as “given” or “as having” its dynamics and logics fully developed. It should accept its current stage of development as the best it can offer *for now*, while we wait (patiently) for it to manifest in other ways, that is, a phenomenological exhibition of itself. And on liberal democracy, has it not become paradoxical that the liberal attitude which allows for the expression of divergent opinions should turn around and

⁶⁹ James M. Edie et al., “Introduction” to *What is Phenomenology?*, by Pierre Thevenaaz (Chicago: Quadriangle Book Inc., 1962), p. 26.

“export” itself like a product (to be bought wholesale) to other parts of the world? The point being made, therefore, is that the democratic ideal is like the phenomenological attitude, both requiring a “presuppositionless, free-from-prejudice” analysis. And it is through an ontological re-examination that this phenomenological attitude toward democracy can be engendered.

That democracy came to Africa with capitalistic intention need not be over-flogged, for it is obvious even to the most consistent propagandist of the “paternalistic civilizing mission” of Europeans to Africa. That explains why the United Nations (nay, the United States) would consider Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 as a top priority, yet Charles Taylor’s slaughter of Liberians at the same period was not of serious concern. The reason is obvious: at that time, Kuwait had over one hundred billion dollars’ investment in Europe and America; if she became the 19th Province of Iraq, all that investment would go to Iraq. Any time we attempt to influence or impose our desires and idiosyncrasies on any phenomenon, it becomes both undemocratic and anti-phenomenological, and expresses the evil that is at the very root of liberalism: egocentrism.

Conclusion

It is important to observe here that in the true phenomenological “climate” or attitude, what we have sketched in this essay is a profile, a mode of the subject of discourse. It represents our description of what we see in the attempt to democratize the African states. We see that this attempt to democratize the African states with “liberalism” is failing because the African societies, wherefrom the modern states are fashioned and created (again by the western powers in the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884-5), are grounded on a communalistic ontology that makes the abstract individualist ontology unable to fit. Our contention is not that pristine African societies were not democratic. Rather, our argument has been that they were not liberal (individualistic). For democracy is but a universal attitude, not just a system of governance.

The African lives in full awareness that it is the exercise of his freedom, and that of the “other,” that makes him real and in their collective interaction; they relate and have their bearing within a community. Expressing the outline of existentialist phenomenology, Jim I. Unah, writes that “Man is not only a being-in-the world; he is

also a being with others. As a man is constituted by his projects and his relations with things which he uses and modifies as utensils for realizing them, so he is related to others who are also beings-in-the-world in the same manner as himself."⁷⁰ Something tells me that Africans are the original "existentialists" and the collective communal existence is what has been articulated as "existentialism" in Western Philosophy.

We have seen that, not only has the individualist ontology been unable to bring harmony to Africa, it has come under attack even by critics of Western civilization. No man can be a "Robinson Crusoe," and the attempt made by liberalism to create a world of isolated egos would always fail in Africa. And until our politicians realize that they cannot climb "up there," and imagine they could create another world for themselves (where the rest cannot penetrate or ascend), we will continue to experience this shadow-boxing with phantoms that has become symptomatic of our political experience and economic liberation. That democracy is equated as an *end* rather than a *means* (to good government) is a fallacy nurtured in and matured by those that have been bitten by the bug of dogmatic and hegemonic logic. Democracy must allow other alternatives to experiment and coexist with the same patience and tolerance it has enjoyed from humanity for several centuries. Or, are we not witnesses to the *oligarchy* formed by our so-called elected *democratic* representatives?

⁷⁰ Jim I. Unah, *Essays on Applied Phenomenology* (Lagos: Foresight Press, 2002), p. 97.

The Politics of Gender Power in Tiv Aesthetic Tradition: Liberation, Centering or Empowerment

ALLOY S. IHUAH¹

Introduction

To be a woman you really are to perform your vital role for your family and society as a woman, and to reap the rich rewards of love and fulfilment that are yours as a woman, you must refuse to reject your fundamental nature as a woman - Mrs. Monica A. Ushir.²

The 20th century has witnessed a powerful wave throughout the world to spiritually and socially uplift women and liberate them from the domination of men. This agitation was carried on through the Beijing Conference of 1995, with the popular belief that human

¹ *Abstract:* This work argues that among the Tiv of central Nigeria, the woman (as wife) is the heart-beat of the household, the measure of all things for the husband and the epicenter of the community. Contrary to the conclusion of the African Neo-cultural positivists, the role that the Tiv traditional social system assigns to *kwase Tiv* (Tiv Woman)¹ does not demean her and make her inferior. She is neither marginalized nor oppressed and exploited in social, political, economic and religious spheres. Gender discrimination is *sine qua non* in traditional society, though it is benevolent. The paper argues further that "redemption" from discrimination for the *kwase Tiv* is neither found in liberating her, for she is not enslaved, nor in centering her, she is the epicenter of the house holder. *Kwase Tiv* in her feminine roles supplements and compliments the man (her husband) for universal beneficence; the common good of *tar-Tiv* (Tiv society). She has womb, kitchen and cradle, but in further empowerment of her female power. We conclude that the roles tradition assigns to women are meant to advance the autonomy of their female power to receive life's impulses to husband the stability and persistence of Tiv society. Woman is a female, and man is a male, different as biological facts though, they both seek in each the being of their beings.

² This was the candid view of Mrs. Monica Ushir, Secondary School Principal and a housewife of over thirty years. Her views in this regard are golden. She was interviewed by the author on 10 December 2000, at Naka, Gwer-West Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria.

progress as a whole depends on the spiritual, social, psychological and economic upliftment of women who are, without any good reason, discriminated against. Acolytes of this theory posit in no unambiguous language that, women world-wide suffer discrimination and oppression, and so they are in need of liberation, centering and empowerment. The question of whether this thinking finds placement in every other African ethnic community is of concern to us in this paper. This work argues that, among the Tiv of central Nigeria *kwase ka ishima I orya* – i.e., the wife is the epicenter of the household, the measure of all things for the husband, and the epicenter of the community.

Contrary to the conclusion of the African Neo-cultural positives, the roles Tiv traditional social system assign to *Kwase Tiv* do not demean her and make her inferior. She is neither marginalized nor oppressed nor exploited in social, political, economic and religious spheres. We argue that though gender discrimination is *sine qua non* in the traditional Tiv social system, it is benevolent. That “redemption” from discrimination for the *kwase Tiv* is neither found in liberating her, for she is not enslaved, nor in centering her, as she is the epicenter of the household – she has womb, kitchen and cradle, but she is in need of further empowerment of her female power. We conclude that the roles tradition assigns to women are meant to advance the autonomy of the female power to receive life’s impulses to husband its stability and the persistence of Tiv society. *Kwase Tiv*, it is contended here, needs further empowerment, not liberation and centering or equality. By the instrumentality of the traditional Tiv governance system, *Kwase Tiv* is a creature whose being attains her true essential human nature through complementarity and supplementarity.

Feminism and Tiv Society

Tiv society operates a dual-sex system in which men and women have distinctive roles. This explains their variegated cultural attitudes subsumed in a sexist ideology. In itself, sexism is the principle of using the differences between male and female human beings as a criterion for determining the social worth and rights of men and women in society. Three levels of sexism are here addressed. Benevolent sexism preaches sympathy with women alongside children as weaker vessels who need support and

empowerment. The Tiv social system practices this in excess, as the local expression has it: *kwase hemen ityav ga*; woman, the life giver does not risk life in wars. In the west, one of the more dynamic examples of benevolent sexism concerned the issue of who had priority to use the life boats while the Titanic was sinking in April 1912. Women and children, it was decided would have priority of access to the life boats³¹. Benign sexism recognizes gender segregation without bestowing sexual advantage or inflicting a gender cost. It is harmless sexism which finds expression among the Tiv in names and ritual ceremonies which celebrate womanhood. Tiv names like Torkwase (Queen Mother) Hembadoon (Female is the best child) Iember (Bundle of joy) are few examples in point. It is also not out of point to state that the widespread practice of polygamy and the payment of bride-price are benign sexism (or benign polygamy) in expression. The women who, as it were, are more in number than the men, are brought together from varied backgrounds and made to establish a dialogic encounter, to create a community with the husband as the head. On the second count, women in Tiv society are treasured as supreme realities, essential beings, and the over-yonder towards which life tends; the Mother, the wife on whom anything and everything is invaluable. The third category, malignant or malevolent sexism, is the most pervasive and most insidious gender ideology. It views every woman as inferior to every man and concludes therefrom that both cannot have equal rights. In most societies, it subjects women to economic manipulation, sexual exploitation and political marginalization. Tiv society recognizes this ideology, though, its practice is limited to women of transgressed character known among the Tiv as *Kasev-Mba-hemban-ato*; the negative Tiv women.

While there are some undocumented, verbalized ethnographic ideas on the basis on which a case can be made for the assignment of inferior roles and status to women in traditional Tiv society, such ethnographic data are however defective and unhelpful on two counts. On the first count, the data fail to go the whole way in viewing the status and role of women as part of a complex totality of Tiv customs and social values.

³ For a detailed story, read A.A. Mazrui, "The Black Woman and the Problem of Gender: Trials, Triumphs, and Challenges," being the 1991 *Guardian Lecture* Delivered in Lagos, on July 4, 1991.

Taking into account the unique nature of the Tiv outlook on the created world, its comprehensiveness, its communality, and its egalitarian, rural and agrarian nature, the traditional Tiv social system consigns to women the roles and status that best agree with the common will, social control and group goals and objectives. The role and status of a sister (*ingnor*), a housewife (*Kwase yough*), a mother (*Ngo*) and divorcee (*wan ya*) are different one from the other. In any or some of these roles, her position may be viewed as “inferior” and “underprivileged.” Yet, in any or some of these roles, her position may also be viewed as “superior” and “privileged.” In Tiv understanding, however, the woman’s role and status is more or less at par with that of the man. This position is well illustrated by Angya (1999) who argues that in any conjugal association, the husband plays the leading role. “The Tiv” she says “do not give to the courage of women the same form or the same direction as to that of men, but they never doubt her courage; and if they hold that man and his partner ought to not always exercise their intellect to be as that of other too”⁴. Angya argues further, like Simone de Beauvoir, that the division between the sexes is not the product of an event in history; instead, this division “is a biological fact.” Women are women, she says, by virtue of their anatomy and physiology, and throughout history they have always been subordinated to men⁵. The Tiv do not think that man and woman have either the duty or the right to perform the same roles, but they show an equal regard for both their respective part; and though their lot is different, they consider both of them as beings of equal value though, like any successful vehicles, they must have only one person on the wheel with ultimate responsibility.

Evidently, clear traits of malevolent discriminatory practices are absent in traditional Tiv social relations. Tiv oral texts abundantly support the thesis that the opportunities of the Tiv woman to achieve her desires are no less than man’s. What defines her social relationships includes, among others, metaphysical prowess, power and authority, wealth, and age. They define the individual’s behaviour in terms of who behaves where, and in the presence of

⁴ Charity Angya (Professor and Director, Centre for Gender Studies/ Experienced Housewife), Recorded interview, Makurdi, 20 August, 2002.

⁵ S. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, in S.E. Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), p. 160.

who. Thus, the Tiv talk of *Or Kwav* (age mate) with whom one is an equal in social interaction. Those who are *Kwav* share between one to two years gap. Kopytoff more lucidly expresses this idea thus: "Lineage authority and representation of the lineage to the outside world are organized on continuum of age that is of relative eldership... Thus, the inequality of power and authority is most pronounced between generations and it is thus presumptuous for the junior generation to question the decision of the senior generation."⁶

Professor C.S. Momoh's generalization most aptly sums up the thinking of the Tiv. According to him, the way African (Tiv) traditional thought had structured things in society was such that old age came first. On this basis, authority, discipline, and respect were to follow. It so happens that in traditional marriages, the husband was often the older and so automatically, by the canons of the social custom, he assumes leadership in the partnerships.⁷

In Tiv marriages, this cultural trait emerges as an invaluable index of social relationship. Thus, the wife obeys and respects her husband not only because he is the head of the family but also because he is elder and the husband controls and directs the wife because she is younger.

Yam-she by which definition is giving out one's sister *ingor* in exchange for another person's sister is said to devalue womanhood though, as a "wife." It was rather a potent means of preserving the basic cultural value of the Tiv by retaining the reproductive force within the community, far from the half truths or outright fabrication that are intent at constructing a blind maze around the true essential being of *Kwase Tiv*.

What is said to be the demeaning status of women today is the result of the abolition of the traditional marriage system. *Yam-she* was a powerful deterrent against tribal disintegration. With its abolition, tradition and custom, and the authority of the elders was easily repudiated. Thus, it became obvious that wives secured under this new system were not tied to any control measure, and so the women (wives) could leave their husbands with the flimsiest excuse. Perhaps this is what accounts for the present day demeaning roles

⁶ T. I. Kopytoff, "Ancestors as Elders," *Africa* (1971), Vol. 41, No. 2, 1290142, at p. 128.

⁷ C.S. Momoh, "Eldership in African Marriages," *African Insight* (1978), Vol. 18 No. 1, p. 41.

and discriminatory practices against women. The Dutch Reformed Christian Missionary (DRCM), Casalegio agrees with this conclusion; “this bride-price marriage which was looked forward to with such great expectation degenerated from its inception into commerce in human lives”⁸.

True, the abolition of *Yam-she* enhanced the position of women because they now had a greater choice of marriage partners or at least a voice in the selection; but it also reduced immorality in Tiv community by enabling the young to marry with personal funds. But it also hastened the atomization of the Tiv community, and demeaned motherhood in the process. In the Tiv social system in which exchange marriage subsisted, the fertility of the wife was enhanced by *akombo*, a spiritual force which was placed outside the house of the wife. The sons that came from this marriage “set right” this *akombo* when necessary to secure health and fertility for their own wives.

Clearly, womanhood was central to Tiv ontology and apparently, motherhood, as espoused above, represented the principle of the fecundity of the family, even though she was a woman of another compound. The shattering of this social system and the emergence of *kem-kwase* eroded the esteemed status of womanhood and invariably disintegrated the community spirit which its essence, the Tiv cherished and guarded jealously. As a consequence, says Rubingh,

the tribe now stood in danger of supernatural affliction, for the means to protect against human pollution had been removed. There was no adequate way to guard miscarriage, abundant conception...now the possessors of evil *tsav* (witchcraft) could move in to strike at their defenseless victims at will.”⁹

Thus far, womanhood in the Tiv social system is holism. She is related to nature to form wholes that are more than the sum of the parts by creative evolution. She is related to the earth and embodied the same fertility as the earth; the natural repercussions in the yield of the fields could be ominously foretold. Such is the status of Tiv

⁸ E. Rubingh, *Sons of Tiv* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 1969), p. 134.

⁹ *Ibid.*

women as mothers that the Tiv find a way acknowledging them in names by directly replicating the name of their dead grandmothers or sisters.

In Tiv society, the entire community has a stake in the marriageable females (*angor*). So argues Rubingh:

if there were many daughters born rather than sons, this was no real loss, for they could be exchanged for additional wives"¹⁰ either for himself, his sons, and/or distressed members of the immediate community who work on his farm. Thus, through *angor*, creativity, and hence continuity of animate and inanimate beings is sustained. The Tiv, therefore, celebrate the arrival of female children as many as they come. This celebration finds expression in names and ritual ceremonies. It is thus common to find such praise names as *Hembadoon* (the best); *lember* (my bundle of joy); *Doobee* (perfect finish); *Afazende* (one with a majestic walk); *Kumashe* (the esteemed woman); *Dookwase* (the beautiful one); *Torkwase* (Queen mother), which all point to the fact that womanhood in traditional *Tiv* society is the over-wonder toward which life tends.

The next question concerns the status of a woman as a divorcee or an unmarried member of the society (i.e., *Wan Ya*). This category of women has been reclassified into two units. Firstly, those who suffered primary barrenness and are tired of "working for other people's children." The second group include those who may have been divorced by their husbands for whatever reason or those whose bride price may not have been paid. Whichever category they belong, the traditional Tiv social system recognized them as full-blooded members of the society who in truth are the connecting rod of continuity between men, the cosmos and nature.

The observation of Ruth Laudes correctly applies to the Tiv, that "throughout Africa, women traditionally have been accorded extensive opportunities... and official recognition (as Priestesses, and mediums... and other authorities supervising women's interest)"¹¹ in

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹ Ruth Laudes in E. Rubingh, *Sons of Tiv*, p. 126.

politics and economy. The case of official recognition of women's status and role in traditional Tiv society explains the election in 1999 of a widow, Mrs. Margaret Icheen, the first female speaker of a house of Assembly in Africa (i.e., in the Benue State House of Assembly). This is in addition to the very many women traditional title holders found all over Tivland.

Division of labour is another parameter for measuring the status of women in traditional societies. The division of labour between husband and wife is either with respect to the upbringing of children or to the production of food for consumption; that between girls and boys as regards the functions expected of them by their family and the community at large; and that between men and women as members of the community. This delineation fits the Tiv social system very well. There are roles that are strictly feminine while others are male defined. The differential roles are consigned by the divine architect in acknowledgment of the physiology of the sexes. Sigmund Freud provides for us a typical example when he says that the moral sensibility of women differs from those of men. Quoting Freud, S.E. Stumpf says one:

cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their superego is never inexorable, so impersonal, so independent from its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Character traits which critics of every epoch have brought up against women – that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility – all these would be aptly accounted for by the modification in the formation of their superego.¹²

Piaget is more outspoken in his observations about the nature of morality in women as compared to the men. In his study of the rules of children's games, he observed that, in the games they played, girls were "less explicit about agreement (than boys) and less concerned

¹² S.E. Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*.

with legal elaboration." In contrast to the boy's interest in the codification of rules, the girls adopted a more pragmatic attitude, regarding a rule as good so long as the game brings reward. Thus, in comparison to the boys, the girls were found to be "more tolerant and more easily reconciled to innovation."¹³

Farming in Tiv society is a hard role. But the man prepares the land and tills the land, while the woman weeds the farm, and harvests and gathers the proceeds for storage. By calculation, the Tiv woman performs sixty to seventy percent of this role (farming) which she understands and interprets as the functional role of a housewife as the chief welfare officer of the family. Understandably, her role in agriculture, though more than that of the man, is not construed as a form of injustice, oppression and or suppression, or even exploitation. The man takes up other socio-traditional roles of *tar-sorun* (governance through *akombo* ritual, *Mba-mzough* (meetings) and *Ijir I orun* (Moot or judicial functions between aggrieved parties) to engender an all-round family development. It suffices to say then that *Kwase Tiv* wielded reasonable political authority, economic power, and more social influence in the pre-colonial period than at any time in Nigeria.

Perhaps this point is more ably captured by Chinweizu, that women *ipso facto* have political power. Women, he says, have more political power than men, because women have the womb, kitchen and cradle. As he put it:

Every day of man's life, he is subject to the dictates of womb, kitchen and cradle. The first set to rule him belongs to his mother; the second belongs to his wife. The first rules him in his invulnerable infancy. The second in his ambitious adulthood. His bride exploits his nostalgia for his mother's set and manipulates his craving for his future wife. This mother, bride and wife control a man every day of his life by playing on his changing needs for womb, kitchen and cradle. The power of the womb is great. It holds the mightiest of men.¹⁴

¹³ A.O Amao-Kehinde, *A Course Text on Human Development and Learning* (Lagos, 2000), p. 126.

¹⁴ In D. Ityavyar, *The Changing Socio-Political Role of Tiv Women* (Jos: University of Jos Press, 1992), pp. 12-13.

This thinking is suggestive of the invisible hand of the women in determining men's actions. It suggests that "men rule the world but women rule men," that men are leaders, but they are led by women. Tiv society reflects the same social behaviour. A Tiv praise singer captures this allusion cryptically thus:

Tiv:

Mbatsev Kpa Yange Kwase agba ve sha Shima kpishi ve vaa nan. Aginde Genaju Yange nee amo kpa vaan Mbasue. Kuje Yum ngu vaan Dondoaoor. Yange Abuul Benga Ndyer hembra Mbagwa Purututu kpa wan-Menda tema. Sha Ukuna shala Tor Achii Ikima Taga Yange nee Tor cii. Una ôr Kwagh asôr Wan-Jobella...

English Translation:

(Our forebears also mourned the woman, who their hearts trust in her. **Aginde Genaju**, the most famous praise singer mourned his wife **Mbasue**, **Kuje Yum** is mourning **Dondoaoor**, chief **Abuul Benga Ndyer**, ruled the entire **Mbagwa** clan draconially, though his wife **Wan-Menda** commanded authority. **Chief Acchii Ikima Taga**, an acclaimed maximum ruler of Kunav sub-clan in Tiv, swore by his wife **Wan Jabela**, before making any policy decision).¹⁵

Understandably, there is a whole world of significance which exists only through woman; she is the substance of men's acts and sentiments, the incarnation of all the values that call out their free activity. For the Tiv, therefore, woman is all that man desires, a god mediatrix between propitious nature and man. The picture presented above clearly illuminates the esteemed and central position of the Tiv women in contrast to the imaginary women of the functionalists. Indeed, the Tiv of the Middle Belt are one among the very few African ethnic groups wherein women occupy important social, political and religious positions in the society. In Tiv metaphysical thought, man and woman are equiprimordially disclosed in the

¹⁵ This is this author's translation of a very common Tiv Folk Song.

world, hence, a successful society depends on a delicate balancing of different (male and female) factors.

Tiv women also have a big role in the economy. Their labour is in no way exploited by their husbands. This truism is pointed out with great clarity by P. and L. Bohannan that,

When a Tiv woman gives her husband yams, the amount is never stipulated and she may well argue. In no case does she give enough to enrich her husband a portion of that money. She spends the money for food, clothing for herself or her children, soap and perfume. Men do not, indeed cannot exploit the labour or the produce of their women. Women from the nearby Udam tribes say they like to marry Tiv men because they treat their wives well¹⁶.

All of these examples are cases of female empowerment in Tiv society. It thus argues that the sustainability of Tiv civilization is founded on solidarity of the family. It is based on man and woman, together, enacting complimentary roles.

Gender in Tiv Literary Genres

Phyllis Schlafly records the reply of one of the most successful writers of the twentieth century, Taylor Caldwell, who was asked by *Family Weekly*, an American magazine, if it did not give her solid satisfaction to know that her novel, *Captains and the Kings* was to be watched as a nine-hour television production. Her reply:

There is no solid satisfaction in any career for a woman like myself. There is no hope, no true freedom, no home, no joy, no expectation for tomorrow, no contentment. I would rather cook a meal for a man and bring him his slippers and feel myself in the protection of his arms than have all the citations and awards and honours I have received worldwide, including the Ribbon of the

¹⁶ P. and L. Bohannan, *The Tiv Tribe* (Kaduna: Gaskiya Publishers, 1956), p. 45; Read also P and L. Bohannan, *The Tiv of Central Nigeria* (London: Oxford Press, 1965).

Legion of Honour and my property and my bank accounts.¹⁷

Talking with Tiv women and ransacking the entire corpus of Tiv oral texts confirms that such a conclusion is in perfect agreement with the thinking of the positive Tiv women. The above conclusion is only one chapter of womanhood in traditional Tiv social thought. There are found also in Tiv society a tiny tribe of negative women (*Kasev mba saan ishe*). Marriage and motherhood, they argue, force women into subservient roles from which they must be liberated. Satisfaction and joy for them in our contemporary world is outside the walls of a man's house. Their thinking is that there is greater career satisfaction in being elected to important positions, travelling to exciting faraway places, having executive authority over large numbers of people and earning a financial fortune. These women shout at and command men and women that, *me yameu kua tsombur wou* i.e., I will buy you and your entire lineage.

Thus, marriage and womanhood which give a woman a new identity and opportunity for an all-around fulfilment, is construed by this category of women as servitude and intolerable. But who is a housewife? *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines housewife as "a woman (usually a married woman) who manages or directs the affairs of her household: the mistress of the family: the wife of the householder; often, a woman who manages her household with skills and thrift, a domestic economist."¹⁸ The Tiv give her a more professional management status as a home executive: planning, organizing, leading, co-ordinating and controlling. She can set her own schedule and standards and have her freedom of choice to engage in everything from children to civic work, politics to gardening. She is thus understood as the representative of the principles of the fecundity of the family, and as one who has complete control of the food supply and authority in domestic affairs. Such is the woman who is respected, honoured and esteemed. Indeed, she knows the secrets of her husband and those concerning the affairs of the clan.

¹⁷ Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New York: Jove Publications Inc., 1978), p. 20.

¹⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1979), p. 281.

On the one hand, is the positive Tiv woman who is quick to identify the pillars of a happy marriage and so combines appreciation and admiration with cheerfulness to magnet her man to the walls of a family house. She has stolen her husband's heart; *ishima i orya* and is a perfect good likened to a special cloth, a treasure which brings prestige and honour to the husband. Such a woman is code-named *pendatyo*, i.e., the husband's headrest. She is willing to give her husband the appreciation and the admiration which his manhood craves. She is extremely strong-willed to temperament and independent in act. She speaks with authority and is forceful to the point of being domineering in her dealing with her fellow human beings; female and male. But for her husband, the relationship is that of the dutiful wife, deferring always to her husband's wishes in her domestic partnership. She makes the husband believe that, to him alone is the entire world. She is submissive and more abnegating than any wife in the environ. She often seats beside her husband with the right hand across the husband shoulders, i.e., *har nom na ityaugh sha kwende* to share life's joys and sorrows. This thinking has been evidently canvassed in Phyllis Schlafly's book *The Power of the Positive Woman* in which she reflects on the sexual liberations and other feminist ideas in comparison to how she has lived. She demonstrates through her life that it was by living a life of devotion and motherhood that she was to be "liberated." Much like Dr. Alice von Hildebrand in *The Privilege of Being a Woman*, Schlafly shows how the system that best promotes women isn't the government, and not even the individual or society; it is God's.

The Negative Tiv Woman

The Tiv describe them as *gbenger er ka iho* – i.e., knife without a handle. Society does not assign to them esteemed roles, *kasev mba i goom ve ibor udam*. They are abandoned as society wives, as mere labourers. Kureve is apt in his description of this category that, *shima I bume kwase ngi shin tyo* – i.e., the mind-set of the negative woman is in her sexy looks. Like a floppy diskette, Kureve vouches further that the woman's entire life secrets are laid bare once the password is decoded through sexual intercourse. She is quick to divulge the

entire secret life of her husband to her lover and or family enemies.¹⁹ The heart of the husband does not trust her. Tiv tradition and custom acknowledge this thinking in Proverbs as follows:

Kwase ka amee aya

(woman is a trickster)

Kwase ka akpakuru (imon) I doo uzere kpa I agher

(woman is akpakuru cloth, it is fitting though, it itches)

Kwase ka ikya, ka I a tsue I pose ahu

(woman is baboon. It is driven by self-interest/profit motive)

Kwase ka suswam, ka une bende awe awambe adue

(woman is hedges with whom every contact incurs its wrath.)

Kwase ka kwagh u yan dar amin ga.

(woman is not a being with whom one gambles.).

As a housewife, the negative Tiv woman suffers from a dozen fallacies of mistaken notions that traditional marriage is based on the wife's submerging her identity, in her catering to her husband's every whims, binding herself seven days and nights a week inside the four walls of the home, stultifying her intellectual or professional or community interests, and otherwise reducing herself to the caricature of a dumb helpless *oryese* – i.e., home assistant. Further and perhaps better understanding of the negative woman is encased in the following Tiv expressions:

➤ Godwin Abuul²⁰

kwase u a soo nom senden kwagh a nom u nan he tembe . Kpa kwase u a soo nom ga yô, nom ngu a penda a lôô, Pue sule ka iyange môm tseghel. Kwase soo nom ngu a tachia er m ngu yan ichan kpa ka chi u mbayev av, kpa Kwase u soo nom ga yo ngue akaa er Imarem a wan ga, Kwagh wough la gande me yem Iwa iyam tar ga."

(The woman who does not love her husband quarrels and misbehaves. When the husband says one thing, she replies him back in two folds. The woman who does not love her husband says children are

¹⁹ S. Kureve, Recorded Interview, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria, 20th Sept, 2002.

²⁰ G. Abuul, Recorded Interview, Makurdi, May, 2000.

“parasites” who must not encroach on her independent self. I am tired of you, I will go back to my father’s house.)

➤ Nyam Ayua²¹ (2002) is even more revealing:

Kasev ka mhônum ma Anyam, Ufa aan ga u yem tyough tingir.

Ka 1 gba pe u ver zwa pe nan lu kuan la,

(The woman is a poisonous substance. It takes knowledge and wisdom to taste; else you will die. You have to know the direction of her thought to create a functional relationship).

➤ Anonymous

Kasev mba I nja er ka we lu a iwa, wea na 1 luam sha nyam je kpa I mough, iyem yon akongo.

(Women are like dogs, pet fed in the house with meat though, they still go out in search of excrements.)

These three songs reveal the true nature of the negative Tiv women, whose satisfaction and self fulfilment is outside the boundaries of conjugal association. In the first song, the most cherished ingredients of marriage and motherhood (that is, appreciation, admiration and cheerfulness) are jettisoned. Children who are the most fulfilling dream of every woman are here said to be an obstacle in the face of other more fulfilling careers. The Tiv would say she is *Bume kwase*, that is, a woman of misguided mission and vision of life.

The second song portrays women as a killer substance. In the most captivating manner, the song paints a picture of an unpredictable being with the capacity to heal and kill, a paradox of a kind. The last song is more forceful. Women in its tone is anathema, who in body and soul is manifestly evil. In a tone which sounds biblical, woman is said to still groan in the dark even though light has come to the world, living in the world, full of “milk and honey”

²¹ N. Ayua (Praise Singer), cited courtesy of Gwaza Uja-Matyo (Broadcaster), Recorded Interview, Makurdi, 20th May, 2002.

though, feeds on “vinegar.” Social relations with this category of women is akin to *uteen kpev shagondo we*, i.e., tricks and dishonesty.

It is perhaps this image of womanhood that might have informed the experience of Kierkegaard in *States on the Road to Life*: “to be a woman,” he says “is something so strange, so confused, so complicated, that no one predicate comes near expressing it and that the multiple predicates that one would like to use are so contradictory that only a woman can put up with it.”²² It suffices to say then that it is not nature that defines woman so negatively in the words above; it is woman who defines herself, by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life. The Tiv are wont to argue however that such understanding is the gateway to the understanding of another chapter of womanhood; the positive woman through whom humanity attains finite nature.

The Positive Tiv Woman

“A bad son may be born but a bad mother does not exist,” says Sankara. A good woman is *Shima I orya* – i.e., the heart of the householder. She is an embodiment of wisdom of knowledge and is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her. She affects the life of her husband so much that life without her has no meaning. *Demelu Koko* very ably chronicles the Tiv experience in this regard,

A woman who wants to affect her husband’s life would herself ask for an assistant, thus allowing her husband to marry a junior wife. Sometimes the senior wife would make the choice herself which in itself was an act of courtesy to a respected husband. This enabled the senior wife to stay in the compound and fix the favorite food of her husband and receive the respect due to her as a senior wife; Mother.²³

The words of the Biblical book of *Proverbs*, chapter 31, fit very well with the Tiv understanding of the positive woman. In part, it states that “her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband praises her, many women have done excellently, but you surpass

²² S.E. Stumpf, *Elements of Philosophy; An Introduction*, p. 33.

²³ D.W. Koko, Recorded interview at Tse-Agberagba, Konshisha L.G.C., on 20th September 1999, by Aloysius Ihuah.

them all." Such is the desire of many women that Mrs. Ronald Reagan summed up in an interview: "I believe a woman's real happiness and fulfilment comes from within her home, with a husband and children." Another woman of substance, Mrs. Golda Meir, the former Israeli Prime Minister, was an outstanding career woman of our time. She achieved more in a man's world than any other woman in any century – and she did it on sheer ability, not on her looks or her legs. She was repeatedly identified as the most admired woman in the world – yet she said, without hesitation, that "marriage and having babies is the most fulfilling thing a woman can ever do."²⁴

Similarly, Madam Mbakaan Tsezughul, a positive Tiv woman, had a very successful business career to the envy of all in Tivland, but she conceded that her crushing disappointment was that she never had a child of her own in the house of a caring and protective husband. Another positive Tiv woman, Madam Abunde Zer, who herself lived an unfulfilled life without a caring and loving husband was constrained to regenerate her extinct family having failed to have children of her own. These examples represent the share of sorrows and sufferings of unfulfilled desires and bitter defeats of positive Tiv women. They are never ever crushed by life's disappointments. Their positive 'The Hk-afe' mental attitude has equipped them with an inner security that the actions of men and society can never fracture. Their problems and travails are not a conspiracy against them in a "man's world," but a challenge to their capabilities. Such challenges are not construed as acts targeted at discriminating against them, neither are they covert or overt disadvantages in life nor acts of enslavement from which their energies will be called to action to liberate herself.

Tiv women are not slaves and so do not beckon to anybody for emancipation and equality with men. Tiv women in their chorused opinion are beneficiaries of an egalitarian society. They are not lured by what seem to women outside Tiv society as the glory of the male regime. The way to a glorious top, they say, is not, and cannot come by mere symbolic imitation of the male or doing better what a man can do. Mrs. Monica Ushir analogously argues the point thus:

²⁴ G. Meir, in Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New York: Jove Publications Inc., 1978), p. 58.

“Woman has her own peculiar glory as different from man’s glory as is the glory of the moon from that of the sun, as is that of the shine of silver from the shine of gold.” Men and women, she says, play complimentary roles arising from the basic difference in their creative energies, which reflects a fundamental division in nature itself into polar opposites of positive and negative forces and potentials, which compliment and supplement each other in running the world.

Unarguably, man’s creative energies are centrifugal, outgoing. He goes forth to conquer the world. On the other hand, woman’s creative energies are centripetal, inward turned and concerned with conserving, sustaining and developing what has been received. To the extent that man and woman compliment and supplement each other, the issue of liberation becomes nonsensical verbiage, for all of man’s accomplishments are central to her being. It follows from this conclusion that, in traditional Tiv society, woman is a centered being of beings. All that man and society need is vested in the woman. She carries in her the children the husband and the society. As one woman says, men are like the headlines of a newspaper, and women are the details. The man as male cannot be indefinitely centrifugal in expanding energy unless there is a center on which he can draw and to which he can return for recuperation, and the woman as female can and does provide the natural resources effective check to avoid disastrous and fragmented Tiv society. *The Story of Adan-Wade*,²⁵ the first classical novel from the Tiv and about the Tiv, is a typical example in this regard. It is thus the mindset of the Tiv woman. This can be highlighted using the words of I.K Zanny, that:

The greatest glory of a woman is... to provide vehicles for the egos that are to come into incarnation, and to preside over a home in which her children can be properly and happily trained to live their lives and to do their work in the world... it is the greatest glory of the feminine incarnation, the great opportunity which women have and men have not. Men have other opportunities, but that really wonderful privilege of motherhood is not theirs. It is the women who do this

²⁵ S. Chia, Adan-Wade Kohol Ga, *The Story of Ada-Wade: A Tiv Classic*, Translated with an Introduction by T. Akosu (Makurdi: Abogun Printing and Paper Mills Ltd, 2001), p. 126.

great work of helping the world, for the continuance of the race.²⁶

Speaking with the mindset of a Tiv woman, Clara Codd appeals to the women of the world whom she believed need not liberation and centering as empowerment. She says;

The real work of women in the building of the new era and the salvation of the future humanity is only just beginning. We must help to bring back to the world the eternally true ideal and conception of woman, her place and work in nature. We must cease to copy men, and dare to be ourselves; discover and organize the real education, the real work, the real function, in nature which belongs to woman, those which will develop her peculiar faculties and make her strong beautiful, pure, intuitive, a miniature mother of God, and Mater consolatrix to the world.²⁷

It thus proves our point that the Tiv woman is not an object of exploitation; the quality of her powers and those of the men are simply distinct one from the other. The woman's powers are silent, while the man's powers are the power of thunder. A combination of the two is what comes down as a state of enlightenment and refinement as opposed to a state of barbarism, which is a reigning virtue now. The suggestion here is that Tiv society is founded on the solidarity of the family, based on man and woman enacting well their natural complimentary roles so as to avoid the disintegration of *Tar Tiv*. What the Tiv woman needs in this age of violence and ugliness in the land is further empowerment, to act out her complimentary role of conserving, sustaining silent background, to transform and accomplish the man's outer, centrifugal energies. Such is when the Tiv would say, *Wan Ushir Kwase wam, uma yo ka cii jene*. i.e., the revered daughter of Ushir my dear wife, such is the being of man. The Tiv do not argue like Aristotle that "the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities afflicted with a natural defectiveness" or like St. Thomas Aquinas, who pronounced woman

²⁶ L.K. Zenney, "Women's Liberation for the New Nascent civilization," *The Theosophist*, Vol. 120, No, 10 (1999), pp. 869ff.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

to be an “imperfect man,” an “incidental” being symbolized in Genesis where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called “a supernumerary bone” of Adam.²⁸ For the Tiv and among the Tiv, man as male has no essential meaning in itself quite apart from the woman as female. Indeed, the Tiv man cannot think of himself without woman and so he eulogizes womanhood as *pende-tyo* (head rest), the brain box, a centre on which he draws beingness, energy and to which he returns for true essential human nature.

Thus argued, it is a grievous error for the Tiv woman to hide herself in shame and act out roles that tend to imitate man symbolically believing same to be glorious. I.K Zanne speaks eloquently against this thinking that, “one great mistake women are making in their struggle for emancipating and equality with men is that, wrongly allured by what they see as the glory of the male regime, they think that the way for a woman to be glorious is to imitate man symbolically, say to wear trousers instead of the skirt... Woman has her own peculiar glory as different from man’s glory...”²⁹ Truly understood though, empowerment is not rubbing shoulders with men, but feeling good about oneself and having confidence to walk into the future genuinely and truly as a woman acting out her being as such.

The positive Tiv woman – the good and beautiful woman – combines intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of manners (*inja*) and good looks (*rmboom*) respectively to qualify as *Shima-I-Orya*; intrinsic qualities of honesty, chastity, humility, compassion, commitment, care, respect and altruism are complimented with her extrinsic qualities of good looks and hardwork. She stands out as a shining example in her community and is always referred to by other men in the community as a living example of an ideal wife. Her beauty is not only of the body but also of the mind.

Conclusion

Lord, give me the strength to change what I can change,
the serenity to accept what I cannot change and the
wisdom to discern the difference.

²⁸ E. Stumpf, op. cit., p. 155.

²⁹ L.K. Zenny, *Ibid.*, p. 869.

The above quip (from the “Serenity Prayer”) can serve as a classic wording to represent the happy assertion of the Tiv women in acknowledgement of the leading role of the man as the head of the home. No doubt, significant change has taken place in Tiv land. This change obviously affects the traditional roles and status of women. However, the esteemed, respected and honoured position of the Tiv woman in economy, agriculture, politics and home affairs still persists. Tiv men are householders, though that never means their women are voiceless beasts controlled by male lords. There is nothing on earth that the Tiv esteem so highly as their women, the most liberated in Nigeria; in fact, agitated feminism common among today’s women is near absent in Tiv society. The Tiv are not quite aware of suppression or oppression. Perhaps what a few of them describe as marginalization, oppression or discrimination is better understood as the general experience of all Nigerians in that distressed nation. Yet Tiv are better placed than their Northern and Southern counterparts³⁰. Though reported to be suffering from patriarchal oppression, the Tiv women themselves say they are satisfied with their position. The mere absence of malevolent sexism in Tiv society has promoted a vibrant tradition of Tiv women who hold positions of importance and relevance in economic and political spheres in Tiv land.

Thus argued, the acquisition of foreign civilization (including Christianity and Islam) and its use as a value trade-off by African women is most dangerous. They have got a mess of porridge but they have lost their birthright. Bernadette Kunanmbi eloquently states the dilemma of the African woman thus, “while Christianity

³⁰ See B. Awe, “The Yoruba Women in Traditional Society” in *Gangan: A Magazine of Oyo State of Nigeria* 8 (1979), 12-16; A. Imam, “The Household: Where are we now?” in a Seminar on Changing Household Kinship and Gender Relations in Africa. CODESRIA/JNESOCO/AAWPRD (Dakar, Senegal, 1998); N. Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized; Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1990-1996* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1987); K. Okonjo, “The Dual-sex political systems of operation; Igbo women and community politics in Mid-Western Nigeria” in Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay, eds., *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); S.B. Oluwole, and S. Alloy Ihuah, *Gender and Constitutionalism* (Final Report prepared by Centre for African Culture and Development: CEFACAD, for Centre for Constitution and Governance; CCG) (Lagos, 2003).

and western type of education gave the African woman the feeling of independence and the ability to stand on her own to make decisions both in family and in society, it robbed her of the traditional protection of the extended family system and of the society, which in the past was the cornerstone of stability in family life... She is gaining what she wants, but losing what she needs."³¹ For humanity to realize its full potential, therefore, there is urgent need for women to realize their true nature and the profound spiritual power for good which resides in that nature; they must take their due complimentary place beside men and assume their true, essential role. Then a saner order and a better civilization may come into being. The Tiv woman like every other woman in Africa surely needs further empowerment. However, the struggle for its attainment needs to go beyond liberation and beyond centering towards genuine sharing of functional roles between the two halves of Africa, male and female. Simone de Beauvoir sums up this thinking ambivalently that, "man seeks in woman the other as Nature and as his fellow being... He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her, she is the source of his being and the reason that he subjugates to his will; Nature is a vein of gross material in which the soul is imprisoned, and she is the supreme reality... Woman sums up nature as Mother, Wife, and Idea."³² That women stand opposed to the men is a primordial reality. But they do not in themselves as a group constitute a separate group similar to the proletariat or bourgeoisie which as a class can think of themselves as separate from the other class. In human interaction, the question is after all, not what women and men are, or whether there are innate psychological differences between the sexes, but what kind of society is morally justifiable. To this question, society must appeal to the notions of justice, equality and liberty. Male and female is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is nothing but retrograde.

It is clear, however, that women's work is critical to the survival and security of poor households and an important route through which they are able escape out of poverty. Greater importance should therefore be given to women's economic contributions in the

³¹ Bernadette Kunanmbi (1978), p. 151.

³² S. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* in Stumpf, pp. 159-160.

design of policy. In Tiv society, economic growth is not only accompanied by a genuine effort to address the constraints that undermine returns to women's labour, but that women from low-income households are encouraged to take advantage of the many opportunities and egalitarian nature of Tiv social system to advance the common good of the family. This does not necessarily mean dismantling various forms of discrimination in the public domain of Tiv social life and paying greater attention to women's workloads in the domestic domain, but in supplementing as well as complementing the female power.

Woman is a female, and man is a male, different as biological facts though, they both seek in each, the other and the being of their beings. There is, as one would say, a whole world of significance, which exists only through their communicative behaviour. This alone is the substance of their acts and sentiments, the incarnation of all the values that call out their free activity.

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Part IV
**On Philosophy with an Intercultural Frame
and Focus**

6.

Philosophy and Inculturation: The Context of Universalism¹

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The nonexistence of uniformity in the methods of cognition cannot be taken as evidence for the phenomenon of “philosophy” missing outside the Western world. In the East, one can witness fidelity to the broad interpretation of “philosophy,” etymologically much nearer to this concept, presuming, along with rationality, the authority of other sources of knowledge. Philosophy came into the world not once but a number of times and in various places. From the outset it bore out, along with common generic traits, its specific “patrimonial” characteristics – in other words, those revealing its own culture. In its turn, each culture is built up around a certain “frame” made up of universal conceptual constituents. The history of philosophy will remain incomplete and one-sided (with a “Western bias”) so long as it ignores the fundamental universals of other culture. Even the universals and values recognized as common to all mankind are frequently imbued with basically different substance depending on the context of relevant culture. The reappraisal of the history of philosophy should make the teaching system of philosophy multicultural.²

¹ *Abstract*: This essay examines the relationship between philosophy and culture, and shows how the two are ineluctably related. Having examined the historicism of inculturation, its hermeneutics and its philosophical significance, the essay confirms inculturation as the most rational grounds for any philosophic endeavour. With the use of the Venn diagram, the essay then demonstrates how philosophy and inculturation are the constitutive bases or contexts for any claim of universalism.

² Marietta Stepanyants, “Rethinking the History of Philosophy,” *Diogenes* 5, nos. 2-3 (2009), pp. 138-150.

Preliminary Remarks

The history of philosophy has been punctuated with attempts by thinkers to bifurcate philosophy from culture, and culture from philosophy. This, for the most part, has proved to be an effort in futility. Such bifurcation has often resulted in the evolution of ideologies and clash of cultures which sometimes result in wars as is currently experienced in the conflict between the Western world, represented by imperialistic capitalism, and the Arab world, represented by Islamic fundamentalism. A fact that cannot be denied by the contending blocks is that imperialistic capitalism, as well as Islamic fundamentalism, are all cultural expressions. One is based on materialistic extremism, while the other is based on religious extremism. In relation to the Southern hemisphere, the monster called globalization³ – whether through the media blitzes or economic and political dragnets – has completely emasculated the cultural identity of the unsuspecting subjects. For obvious reasons, I dare say, there is no contest between the North and the South.

Another example of a mental separation in thought often occurs when reference is being made about thoughts from the non-western world; they are often referred to as “cultural philosophy.” This often gives the impression that in Western philosophy, there is nothing cultural; thus, its claim of objectivity and universality both in method and content. But such cultural arrogance is the root cause of intolerance and world conflicts. The ensuing conflict and the general unsafe situation in the world have necessitated the call to rethink what philosophy is and what its role is in ordering the world so as to avoid undue conflict of cultures.

From every indication, it does appear that, whether in theory or in practice, there can be no culture without philosophy, and vice versa. The relationship between philosophy and culture is like that which exists between theory and practice. The two are inseparable. It is, therefore, important that the two concepts, philosophy and culture, should be examined with the aim of showing how they are different and how they are related. The place of inculturation in any

³ Globalization is an economic construct that aims at making the whole world one market-place. It is described as a monster because it does not only bring about cultural deracination to unsuspecting subjects but it also occasions economic strangulation and political subjugation.

philosophic activity will also be examined with the hope of highlighting its contribution to universalism in philosophy.

Culture and Philosophy

Every group of people have something that is uniquely their own, that which constitutes their difference and gives them their distinctness. This unique difference is what is often referred to as the people's culture. By "culture," here, is meant a people's way of life. It could be used with reference to the sum total of the people's ways of life or with reference to a particular or specific aspect of the people's way of life, such as language, the way they think and the way they express their thought or in their technology.

A people's culture is contingent on their philosophy. Philosophy is here understood as a people's fundamental principle(s) for understanding and responding to their universe of existence – what in a very tenuous sense could be referred to as their world-view. This fundamental principle(s) has both theoretical and practical import. It is theoretical in so far as it directs the thinking and the perceptual orientation of people. It is practical in so far as it directs people's everyday activities.

Where there is a culture, philosophy must have been born and evolved, and where philosophy exists, culture cannot but emanate. The relationship between philosophy and culture is, thus, atomic. A culture is often evolved or brought about through the process of a conscious translation of one's ideas into words and actions. These antecedent ideas, which give birth to people's way of life, are what is often referred to as the people's fundamental principle(s) or philosophy of life. To put it differently, one can say, then, that it is philosophy that gives birth to culture and at the same time interprets, enlightens and gives meaning to culture. Culture, on the other hand, is what externalizes, articulates and gives expression to philosophical presuppositions.

It would seem, therefore, consistent to say that there can be no culture without philosophy, and there is no philosophy that is not translated by culture. To this extent, one can conveniently say that the very act of philosophizing is itself a cultural activity. One way of resolving world conflicts is openness to other cultures and philosophies with a willingness not only to study, but also to learn from and appreciate, what the other holds valuable.

It is in this context that this conference on intercultural philosophy gains significance, as it prides itself as a forum for exchange of ideas and dialogue between cultures on a trans-cultural basis. These are noble and laudable aspirations in a world that seeks to rethink its philosophical method and content. But the first problem that must be noted is that the very concept of “trans-cultural philosophy” is, in my opinion, not only erroneous but self-negating. There is nothing like trans-cultural philosophy, for every philosophy, as already argued, is culture-bound.⁴ This is why, in the history of philosophy, we hear of such expressions as Western philosophy, European philosophy, American philosophy, African philosophy, Indian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, etc. The presumption, therefore, that it is possible for philosophy to be trans-cultural is, in my opinion, a surreptitious way of relapsing into the methodological essentialism or methodological realism that not only impoverished Western philosophy,⁵ but also led to a skewed philosophical historicism⁶ that resulted in the centuries of intellectual totalitarianism, despite its pretentious claims of individualism and the individual’s right to self expression.

Another concern of this presentation is that in a conference of this nature, where the concern is the exchange of ideas and cooperation, attention is rarely paid to the dynamics, context and process that bring about exchange and cooperation. It is for this reason that this paper seeks to argue for inculturation, not only as the context and process of philosophical exchange, but also as the matrix for the possibility of any form of philosophizing or cultural exchange. The assumption is that any form of philosophizing is a product of intra- and inter-cultural encounter. This intra/inter-cultural activity takes the form of inculturation. Thus, inculturation itself can be reasoned to be, not only a process, but also a cultural artefact or a philosophic act.

⁴ See Ernest Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Culture* (London: Milford, 1944).

⁵ It is this impoverishment that has led to the insecure world that has necessitated the call for a rethink of philosophy as was echoed at the 2008 World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul, South Korea.

⁶ By “historicism” is meant a methodological principle of an analysis of the social world and its evolution.

Historicism of Inculturation

“Historicism” is a word that is already very familiar in both the modernist and post-modernist grammatology and contemporary discourse, so I will not belabour the subject. But for the purpose of this essay, by “historicism” here is meant a methodological principle of an analysis of the social world and its evolution. The word “inculturation” is present mostly in theological texts, and is only newly attempting to make inroads into philosophical discourse. For that reason, effort would be made to explain the term and its philosophical significance.

Inculturation, as a phenomenon in the process of human civilization, is as old as man himself. But the concept and its subsequent thematization first came into prominence through Christian theologians’ attempt to explain and to universalize the Christian message in all cultures of the world.⁷ In theological discourse, where the word is already part of a regular vocabulary, it is defined as:

The incarnation of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring out a new creation.⁸

The operative word in this definition is “incarnation,” understood as the manifestation of the divine culture in a human culture. The divine lets itself be seen and experienced in and from within the human culture. The process that brings about this manifestation is inculturative. By extension, the Christian life and the Christian message are in themselves cultural expressions; their encounter with other cultures and the resultant effects of animation and transformation can only be authentic within the context of the

⁷ S. Iniobong Udoidem, *Pope John Paul II on Inculturation: Theory and Practice* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996), p. 1.

⁸ Pedro Arrupe, “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation,” *Studies in International Apostolate of Jesuits* 2 (June 1978).

inculturational experience, wherein none of the interacting cultures loses its identity, yet there is a newness of life that is transformative.⁹

In philosophical discourse, where the word “inculturation” is only beginning to make inroads, it is understood as a process by which a culture emanates from another culture, not as a result of synthesis, as from two opposing cultures, but as the original culture, which has been animated as a result of encounter with another culture. Each of the encountering cultures remains renewed without losing its worth. This relationship will be fully explained with the use of Venn diagrams in the section on the hermeneutics of inculturation. The process is something similar to an experience in knowledge acquisition, which Aristotle describes as “assimilation without destruction.” It is an interaction of cultures, each not losing itself to the other but, rather, gaining respect in the process of self-accounting. The process could be likened to the relationship between writing and authorship. The words that an author uses are not his own; the words are already in existence prior to their being appropriated. The only thing that is original to the author is the idea that guides the rearrangement of the existent words. It is the idea and the rearrangement that makes one an author. The relationship between words, word arrangement, and authorship is inculturational. The culture of words and the culture of thought mutually cooperate without each being mutilated or losing its identity. The words would always maintain their identity, and could be used by another author or the same author to give birth to a different text.

An insight to the nature of inculturation could further be gained through a story that was once told by his Eminence Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, the first Anglophone West African Cardinal. He told us a story of how, in the early fifties, as a young bishop, he went to America to campaign for missionary support. On one occasion in Chicago, after he finished his address, one of the participants asked him why Africans always begin their speech with a story, to which he responded simply by saying “It is part of our culture. Africa has a story-telling culture.” He then noted that forty years after, when he attended a Seminar in the Diocese of Chicago, he was pleasantly

⁹ A detailed discussion on incarnation and inculturation is in S. Iniobong Udoidem, *Pope John Paul II on Inculturation*, pp.48-61.

surprised to observe that every American that spoke always began with a story. The significance of this story is that story-telling, which was originally seen as an aspect of African culture, had now also become part of American culture. Between African culture and American culture, inculturation had taken place. Mutual cooperation had taken place without any of the original cultures losing its identity. The African stories remained African while American stories remained American, yet they had something in common, namely, story-telling. Having attempted to give a meaning to the process of inculturation, the next section will focus on how inculturation has always been the matrix of philosophizing.

The Philosophical Significance of Inculturation

The first moment of human “consciousness” was characterized by the awareness of human ignorance. It was at that first moment of human consciousness that man raised the question, “What?” The question signified the desire to escape ignorance. It was an invitation to self discovery as a self accounting being. The culture of desiring to know intruded into the culture of not knowing as an intra-cultural act (intra-subjectivity), which is here described as “inculturation.” Thus, the raising of the question and the quest for the answer were *ab initio* cultural activities. It was not a question to the other as there was no community; rather, it was directed to the self. The dilemma of finding the answer in a questioning self is what Socrates so vividly and efficiently articulated. If man raised the question, “What?” and proceeded to give the answer, then if he knew the answer, why did he raise the question? The implication is that if he did not know the answer, then whatever answer he gave to the question was/is not the answer to the question. This is the historical status of all speculation. Perhaps it was out of the frustration of not being able to untie the untie-able knot or shovel the smoke, as Aristotle would put it (Meta. Bk III Ch. 1), that man offered to engage in dialogue with others; “Do you know it?”¹⁰ Dialogue in this Socratic sense was engagement in inter-subjectivity. This inter-subjective cultural encounter was inculturative in character. Since no one knew the answer to the

¹⁰ “Do you know it” is the genius of Socratic interrogation and of Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice*. See Gabriel Okara, *The Voice* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1964).

question “What?” there was mutual cooperation. Everyone’s opinion was respected.

Socrates, the genius of “homo ignoramus,” was never dogmatic or authoritarian. He understood that, from the first moment of human consciousness, the most important thing about the human being was/is to be self-accountable, hence his maxims of self accountability: “Man know thyself” and “an unexamined life is not worth living.” These maxims were/are not only challenging but disturbing. Questions about self accountability (moral life) are avoided by most adults; they prefer to earn money and live lives of undisturbed routine. The same thing is also true about the search for knowledge. Most people are uncomfortable with questions and criticisms; rather they are comfortable with establishing systems and comfortable routines. One such person was Plato, when he abandoned his master’s “homo ignoramus” context and invented a system that guaranteed “knowledge” by postulating the existence of the ideal world where true knowledge exists. This was the root origin of intellectual authoritarianism and imperialism. But Socrates, his master, understood well that real knowledge comes from discussion and argument, and that discovering knowledge is a cooperative venture. Hence, his notion of dialogue.

It is interesting to note that both Socrates and Plato advocate dialogue. But it should be noted that their understandings are different. For Socrates, dialogue is mutual cooperation, not from any advantaged position, but from a discussion among a class of “homo ignoramuses” who know that they do not know. Plato, who considered himself a faithful disciple of Socrates, ended with the annulment of the most precious discovery of his teacher – “I know that I don’t know.” For Socrates, “I know that I do not know,” so let me continue to reflect or search or “come let us dialogue.” For Plato and Aristotle, “I know what is true; come let us dialogue, i.e., “come let us work towards it.” The only common ground for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, in the invitation to dialogue, is to escape ignorance.

Even though Plato also called for dialogue in the form of dialectics, movement from the state of ignorance to the state of knowing, the presumed existence of the supra-sensible state of knowing and the movement towards it gave rise to what Karl Popper described as the emergence of methodological essentialism, or methodological realism, which eventually gave rise to modern

totalitarianism, dogmatism and imperialism.¹¹ With the new consciousness, from Plato through Aristotle, that the purpose of the search for knowledge was to discover and make an inventory of the “real nature,” essence, or real meaning of various theoretical abstractions, the status of dialogue became obfuscated. Dialogue now became an invitation to discourse from a privileged position. This is why the proclaimed father of modern philosophy, Rene Descartes, could say, *Cogito ergo sum*: “I think therefore I am.” Because I think and I am, therefore I know, and because I know, others do not know. Dialogue for the modern philosophers and subsequent Enlightenment thinkers meant imposing what one knows or his idea on the one who is assumed not to know. This, perhaps, is what gave impetus to the early missionary endeavour and practice.

The rediscovery of the original mission of philosophy, escaping ignorance, the raising of the question, “What?” where no one knows the answer, is a natural level ground or invitation to dialogue properly understood. This was the genius of Socrates in his claim, “I know that I don’t know,” of Thomas Aquinas in his “*Via Negativa*,” or of Ludwig Wittgenstein in his “I know not what.”

Aristotle followed Socrates and Plato to assert that the search for knowledge is to escape ignorance. But, like Plato, he built a system of knowing without paying attention to fact that once you have claimed to have escaped ignorance by claiming knowledge, you have lost the capacity, not only to desire, but also to search, in an authentic way. What one is left with is an authoritarian regime, a trap that all subsequent philosophers from the classical to medieval and from modern to contemporary periods have fallen into. What should be noted is that both Plato’s knowledge construct and Aristotle’s system, and, indeed, all other typologies in the history of philosophy, are cultural expressions, and, therefore, have no superior rights over other cultures.

In Plato’s intellectual authoritarianism, as represented in the famous Allegory of the cave (*Republic*, VII), which illustrates the nature of the search for Plato’s “true knowledge,” what he (Plato) failed to acknowledge was that, at the moment when the journeying soul gets out of the cave to confront the overwhelming source of

¹¹ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 1-2 (London: Routledge, 1966).

light – the Sun, and is blinded by the light, he naturally returns to what his master (Socrates) experienced when he exclaimed, “I am ignorant,” “I know that I do not know.” That blinding of the journeying soul is symbolic of the eternal return to the first moment of human consciousness when man was called to be self accountable. St. Augustine noted it well when he said that the truth of who we are is not outside of us but within us.¹² Therefore, if we are to be self accountable, we must look inward and not outward. When, therefore, there is a self accounting opportunity, as in the case of dialogue between two cultural expressions, there is a somewhat osmotic relationship between the two cultures. It is this osmotic transaction between cultures that is called inculturation – the intruding of one culture into another without any of the interacting cultures losing its identity. It is this non-losing of identity that is responsible for the character and identity of every philosophical system. This is what allowed Thales to see water as the primary substance of the universe while Anaximander thought of the boundless substance, and Pythagoras of the Ionian school thought about number as the primary substance. This was followed by the building of systems beginning with Plato’s Idealism, Aristotle’s Realism, Augustine’s Intuitionism, Descartes’ Rationalism and Berkeley’s Empiricism, etc. All these are cultural forms that have progressively originated as a result of moments of inculturation.

Hermeneutics¹³ of Inculturation

The philosophical significance of inculturation can best be appreciated in the attempt to grapple with the dialectics of understanding and interpretation. This is crucial when we note that

¹² *Noli foras ire, in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas* See St. Augustine, *De Vera Religio*, chap. 39, p. 72.

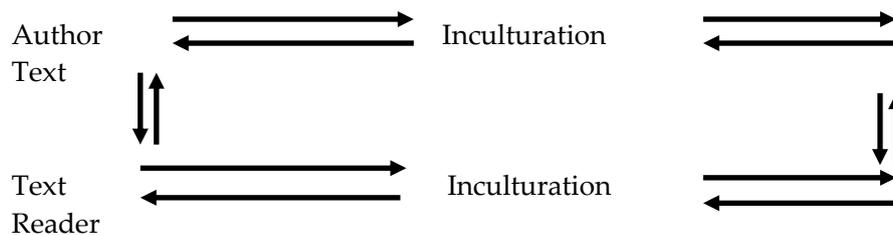
¹³ The etymology of the term “hermeneutics” is rooted in the name Hermes, the messenger of the gods of the ancient religious traditions of both the Egyptians and the Greeks. As the messenger and interpreter of the messages of the gods, Hermes had to be conversant with the idioms of the gods as well as those of the humans. He had to understand and interpret for himself what the gods wanted to convey before he could proceed to translate and explain the intention of the gods to humans. It was Hermes’ task of having to go forward and backward (from the gods to humans and from humans to the gods) both in understanding and interpretation that is often referred to as the hermeneutical journey.

the whole enterprise of philosophy, from its inception, centres around the effort either to understand or interpret reality. It is this mental journey from interpretation to understanding, and from understanding to interpretation that is the hermeneutic endeavour in the contemporary search for meaning and certain knowledge. The philosophical problem that also surrounds this endeavour involves whether one should interpret reality before he understands it, or whether one is to understand before he interprets. This has been a subject of philosophical hermeneutics since the 19th century, beginning from Frederick Schleiermacher and William Dilthey to the radicalized versions of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur.

Schleiermacher viewed hermeneutics as the art of understanding, while Dilthey maintained that hermeneutics is both the art and science of understanding and interpretation. Edmund Husserl combined phenomenology and hermeneutics, and developed a new way of philosophizing in his phenomenological theory of meaning and of meaning comprehension. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger gave a new meaning to the term "hermeneutics" by associating it with the whole enterprise of philosophizing. For him, the task of manifestation is not only phenomenological, as proposed by Husserl, but is fundamentally hermeneutic. Heidegger's argument is that since the methodological intent of phenomenological description is to interpret, and the logos of the phenomenology of human existence has the character of *hermeneuein* (Greek, to interpret) – interpretation, then phenomenology is basically hermeneutical. In the Heideggerian sense, therefore, hermeneutics is a tool for uncovering the ontological structure of any form of manifestation. Following this Heideggerian hermeneutical reasoning, inculturation as a hermeneutical enterprise could be reasoned as a tool for uncovering the ontological structure of any philosophical activity or the relationship between understanding and interpretation. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer rationalized hermeneutics as a philosophical method by returning it to its traditional grounds of the problem of understanding and interpretation. For Gadamer, the interpreter is always guided in his understanding by his own particular set of "prejudices" – his cultural context.

Some have defended the position that all forms of understanding are interpretations, while others have taken the opposite camp of holding that all interpretations are based on a particular frame of understanding. However, there seems to be a general consensus in contemporary thinking, as represented by the works of Gadamer, Derrida and Ricoeur, that the two are so closely related that you cannot have one without the other. It is in this mental journey from interpretation to understanding, and from understanding to interpretation, that the hermeneutics of inculturation is brought to the fore.

Here, inculturation is seen to be related to understanding as interpretation is related to inculturation. Without inculturation, understanding would be impossible, and without interpretation, inculturation would be impossible. It is only within the matrix of inculturation that hermeneutics as a philosophical enterprise can be discussed. "Inculturation" in this context becomes the operative word which Heidegger and Gadamer needed to explain the logic of what they meant by "hermeneutics." It is also the operative word that Derrida and Ricoeur needed to explain the logic of intra- and inter-textuality when they attempted to explain the relationship between the author and the text on the one hand, and the reader (interpreter) and the text on the other.



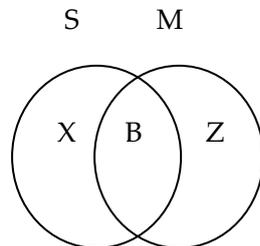
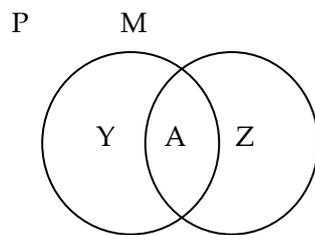
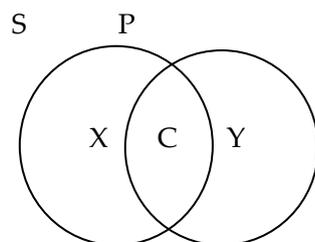
Having demonstrated this about the role of inculturation in understanding and interpretation, it should be noted, as Gadamer admitted, that understanding is possible only if the object to be understood and the person involved in the act of understanding are not alien entities. In this sense, there must always be a context if inculturation is to occur. It is this context that Derrida, in his analysis of the relationship between the text and the reader, describes as the "protocol of reading." As any experienced reader would know, there is always a multiple understanding to a given text, each depending

on the cultural input of the reader, yet there is always a context or level ground which makes shared understanding possible. This context or grammar of mutual understanding has remained a very complex issue in the history of language, words, and meaning formation (semantics). Its discussion is outside the scope of this presentation. But in terms of the original context, the Socratic “homo ignoramus” and reciprocity remain the best level grounds for a philosophical activity that respects self accountability and the autonomy of cultures. Reciprocity here is understood as the ability of one culture to recognize in the other that which they have in common. As a result of this common element, they are able to communicate and share understanding without losing their identity. Reciprocity, therefore, could be described as a shared responsibility. Dialogue that involves shared responsibility (reciprocity), as in the Socratic sense, remains the best form of philosophizing, and inculturation the best form of dialogue.

Taking philosophy as the primal inculturation which took place at the first moment of human consciousness, inculturation today becomes a repeat which pushes forward and produces what it repeats, namely philosophy. This hermeneutical repetition is not a crude repetition, but a repetition which produces something new. Thus, we can see that in the Understanding – Inculturation – Interpretation relationship, there is interwovenness and creativity. This is the kind of rethink of philosophy that can bring redemption to philosophy as something desirable and universal.

Inculturation and the Logic of Identity and Universality

What has emerged from the discussion so far is the fact that philosophy is a cultural activity; that in every culture, there is philosophy; and that, without inculturation, there can be no philosophical activity, in which case, both philosophy and inculturation do have a universal character. In this section, I will explain the logic of identity and universality of philosophy and inculturation, with the use of a Venn diagram. Let us consider the relationship between cultures S and M, P and M, and S and P below.

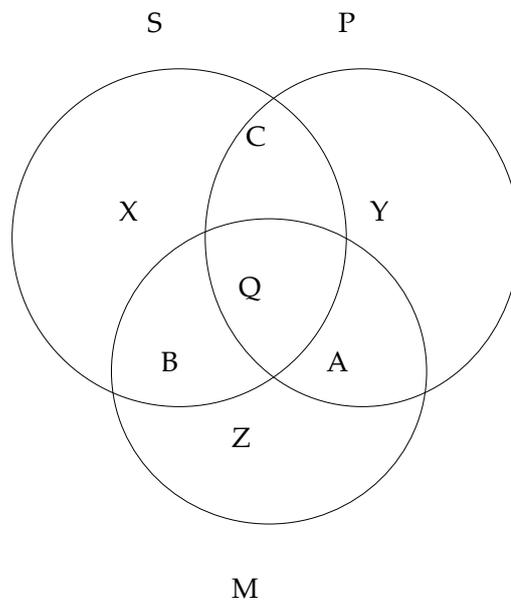
Figure i**Figure ii****Figure iii**

S and M, as in Fig. i above, share B in common, which allows for the possibility of S being similar to M. B is the matrix of reciprocity and shared responsibility. It is B that allows for the possibility of inculturation between S and M. What is also significant in this relationship is that it is X and Z that allow for the identity of S and M respectively. Another very significant thing is that, as a result of the encounter, XB (S) and ZB (M) now become enlivened and transformed through enrichment, while still retaining their identity. This new identity is not exactly as the old, but is renewed. The same is also true of the relationship between M and P as in Fig. ii where they share A in common. Z and Y guarantee the identity of M and P

respectively. In the case of S and P, as in Fig. iii, C is the common element, while X and Y warrant the identity of S and P respectively. In Figs. i-iii, B, A, C function as unifying elements and the context of inculturation, while X, Z, Y subsist as the principles of identity respectively.

When the interaction involves more than two cultures, as in Fig. iv below, the same logic of universality or common element is involved if there is to be any relationship between the different cultures.

Figure iv



Philosophy and inculturation (represented by the Q in the diagram Fig. iv) are the universal elements in all cultures, and they remain as the matrix of all forms of dialogue and shared responsibility (reciprocity). In the diagram, we have cultural universes represented by M, S, and P. These initially autonomous and independent universes interact with one another and as a group, through the process of inculturation brought about by dialogue, occasioned by mutual philosophical search.

In the universe M, M possesses Z as a distinctive characteristic not shared by the others (S, P). In the universe S, S possesses X a

distinctive character not shared by others (M, P). In the universe P, P possesses Y as a distinctive characteristic not shared by others (S, M). It is the unshared characteristics (Z, X, Y) that give the distinctive identity of the different universes or cultures and philosophies.

In considering M, S, and P as in Fig. iv, Q is the common element that unifies the three cultures. In Figs. i-iii, B : A : C as BQ : CQ : AQ; in Fig. iv this unification is only possible within the context of inculturation. It should also be noted that, if there were no Z, X, Y, there would be no independent identities or distinctions. It is these individual identities that carry with them what is common, and the common elements cannot do without them. In any dialogue or philosophical engagement, the individual identity is as crucial as the common elements. If there were no distinctions or plurality, the sense of universality would be impossible. If there were no plurality, there would be no necessity for dialogue. Since philosophy and inculturation thrive in dialogue, plurality is a necessity. Therefore, one can say that difference and plurality are necessary for universality, and that it is only philosophy and inculturation that stand out as the basis of any form of universality claim. Philosophy itself is a universal phenomenon, and inculturation is what allows for any form of philosophic activity. Wherever there is philosophy, there must be inculturation, and wherever there is inculturation, philosophy must emanate.

Conclusion

What was intended in this essay was to argue that all philosophical expressions are cultural expressions, that the very act of philosophizing is a cultural activity, and that inculturation is the universal context of any form of philosophizing.

Having examined the intrinsic relationship between philosophy and culture, and between culture and philosophy, it is evident that philosophy and culture are so ineluctably related that the one cannot do without the other. Every philosophy has been shown to be a cultural expression. The study of the historicism of inculturation, its hermeneutics and philosophical significance show that hermeneutics is the foil for understanding the mechanics and logic of inculturation, and that inculturation is the only context within which any philosophical activity can occur. With the use of the Venn diagram, it

has been shown that philosophy and inculturation are the most rational grounds for any claim of universalism.

This rediscovery of the original mandate of philosophy as a call for self accountability, and inculturation as the universal context of all forms of philosophizing or cultural encounters, has implications for all other human endeavours. First of all, it serves as a unifying principle that could usher in a new world order (intellectually and socially), wherein diversity of culture would be an instrument not for division but cooperation and unity. Pope John Paul II, in his Address to the United Nations General Assembly, noted the same understanding when he said:

Different cultures are but different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence...Every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person...Our respect for the culture of others is therefore rooted in our respect for each community's attempt to answer the question of human life.¹⁴

With this new paradigm of perception, philosophical endeavours will no longer be viewed as activities whose task is aimed at cultural imperialism, but as engagements whose aim is to discover the various manifestations of reality embedded in the various cultures. Political and economic strategies will no longer be designed for the purpose of impoverishing other nations, but aimed at achieving a world community with mutual needs and aspirations, a world community where cooperation and not domination will be a priority. This definitely would lead to a more peaceful world where human dignity is respected and the autonomy of cultures and nations cherished.

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¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, Address to the United Nations General Assembly on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary, New York, October 5, 1995.

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Universalism and Relativism in Philosophy: Nature, Problems, and Contemporary Significance¹

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Introduction

The notion of universals has its genesis in attempts directed to different, though connected, objectives: to make intelligible the recurrent patterns found in experience and to clarify the use of general terms. However, the introduction of the notion leads directly to further questions about the sort of “existence” or “ontological status” that is attributed to universals, and it leads also to questions about how universals are related to particulars.² John of Salisbury, the 12th century historian who wrote concerning the universals controversy, trenchantly remarked that anyone who looks for species and genres outside the mind is wasting time. According to him, universals are mental constructions or products of human reason, not extra-mental realities.

¹ *Abstract:* This paper admits the obvious contrast between universalism and relativism in philosophy. It shows universalism as a view that facts can be discovered objectively and that they thus apply universally in all situations, times and places; and that relativism is an idea that some elements or aspects of experience or culture are relative to other elements or aspects. Universalism’s nature is considered from the concept of universals metaphysically (ontology) and epistemologically; while relativism’s nature is viewed from an axiological dimension. In the nature of universals is a consideration of realism and conceptualism, in which realism ranges from extreme realism to moderate realism. Conceptualism embodies the nominalism of medieval times and Kantianism of modern times. Relativism is narrowed down to ethical relativism from the descriptive relativism and metaethical relativism perspectives. Their problems are addressed by questioning the grounds of each of their standpoints based on historicity in the intellectual world. As to contemporary significance, interest is shown on the defense or contributions of each position to the development of human society existentially, ethically and culturally.

² E. Nagel and R.B. Brandt, *Meaning and Knowledge: Systematic Readings in Epistemology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965)

The problem of universals is one that is always present in philosophy but it takes different forms at different periods. Broadly speaking, this problem is concerned with the relation between universal conceptions and the external world which we come to know by means of them. The question of how far does human thought give a true account of the external world comes to the fore in the nature of the universal. In contemporary times (as in ancient) comes the question, are those uniformities which we know as scientific laws actually in the objects themselves, or are they modes in which the human mind thinks in order to understand the behavior of things? It is obvious that the medieval mind had not reached this stage of analysis. The philosophers of the early Middle Ages approached the problem of universals through a consideration of the meaning of class names – that is, the names of genera and species (such as man, horse, oak, animal, etc.), the common nouns of the English language, and the names of qualities such as justice, freedom, equality, etc., are treated as universals.³ Take the case of man as a noun. For the medieval philosophers, the question put was: What is involved when we say of a given individual that he is a man? Does it involve saying that he participates in some higher reality, called human nature or humanity, and that exists as a something distinct from the individual men who make up the human species? Or is humanity a quality that exists only in the individuals in which the quality is exemplified? Is the common nature in which all individual men share a purely mental conception, due to the experienced resemblances between all members of the species? Or does the name merely cover a classification of convenience which has no foundation in fact? In case of justice as a universal, is it something which has an existence apart from just men and just actions, or is it the quality inherent in men and actions in virtue of which we call them just?

According to Copleston,⁴ Boethius supplied the medieval philosophers with the distinction between words of first intention or imposition (such as 'man' in 'Socrates is a man') and words of second intention or imposition (such as 'man' in 'man is a noun').

³ S.J. Curtis, *A Short History of Western Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Maryland: The Newman Press, 1950).

⁴ F.C. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974).

Again, it was in connection with a text of Boethius that the problem of universals was raised, a problem which was discussed, with varying degrees of sophistication, throughout the Middle Ages. The problem of universals is fundamental to philosophy and in the medieval period with philosophers coming in contact with the works of Plato and Aristotle. The problem admits of four possible types of answer.

Extreme Realism

This is the doctrine which asserts that mental conceptions such as goodness, justice and equality, have a real existence apart from the particular objects of the sense world which exhibit these qualities. Objects in the sense world possess reality only in far as they share in the independently existing ideas. The ancient form of this problem, Russell admits,⁵ is found in Plato's 'theory of ideas,' referred to in the Platonic dialogues as the doctrine of 'forms or ideas'. Platonic realism as a solution to the problem of universals was criticized by Aristotle on the ground that experience presents us with a world of individual things which are the most real relative to us. Aristotle, however, admitted that the universals are most real in themselves since we can know the world only by means of them. This view at once raises the problem of how universal conceptions are applicable to a world of individuals. Early Christian philosopher-theologians, such as St. Augustine, adopted Platonic realism with the important modification that they regarded the ideas as exemplars in the Divine Mind after the pattern of which the world was fashioned. The medieval philosophers, influenced by the writings of St. Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius, were extreme realists.⁶ The Extreme Realism advocated by Plato maintains that universals exist, *ante rem* (independently of any spatiotemporal particulars that may embody them).

Moderate Realism

This view is found in philosophers like Aristotle in Greek philosophy, and St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas in medieval philosophy. The Moderate Realists, while conceding that

⁵ B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912).

⁶ S.J. Curtis, *A Short History of Western Philosophy in the Middle Ages*.

individuals are both prior in knowledge and most real to us, teach that universals are most real in themselves. This implies that individuals can be known or apprehended only in terms of universals. The paradox is solved by means of the doctrine of abstraction. The universal has no existence apart from the individual things in which it is realized – for example, horse nature is to be found only in individual horses, and justice exists only as realized in just men and just actions. Accordingly, the mind has the power of abstracting the universal from the individuals in which it is realized, and of considering it apart from the individualizing conditions of the sensible world. The full statement of Moderate Realism depended upon the progress of psychological analysis, and therefore the view was fairly late in development.⁷ Moderate Realism is a reflection of the scholastic theory of abstraction when tracing the transition from sense to intellect, and the relations between the respective objects of sense and intellect. It is well to distinguish between facts and theory. The facts are revealed by introspection, and the most important among them are the operations of the external and internal senses; by our consciousness of these cognitive activities, we are made aware of concrete, individual data or objects or phenomena – things, events, sense feelings, sensible qualities, etc., – a conscious stream or manifold of impressions. According to Coffey,⁸ each of these we apprehend intellectually as an abstract thought-object, as an isolated aspect of the sense-manifold, and thus we gradually come into possession of a stock of abstract and universal concepts or thought-objects whereby we interpret the individual data of sense and acquire knowledge of what we believe to be the real universe or totality of things. This “moderate realism” of Aristotle holds that universals exist, *in re* (only as embodied in such particulars).

Conceptualism

This is the position which represents the final development in medieval thought on the problem of universals. The conceptualists admit the validity of universal conceptions as mental facts and attribute their formation to the synthetic activity of mind. The nature of the latter is such that we are obliged to think by means of

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ P. Coffey, *Epistemology, Vol.1* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1917).

universals, but we can never know if there is any reality outside the mind corresponding to such conceptions. According to Woozley,⁹ conceptualism should not be regarded strictly as a rival theory of realism, even if some of its exponents have mistakenly so regarded it. Starting from an extreme Aristotelian position, that everything which exists is particular, conceptualism concentrates on the fact that generality is an essential feature of both experience and language, and it seeks to answer the question how mental concepts are formed, how they can be general if the data of experience from which they are formed are particular, and how words are general in their significance. William of Ockham and his followers were the medieval representatives of this view, and in modern times, Kantianism is the most complete exposition of conceptualism.

Nominalism

In the controversy of universals, Nominalism is the last of the possible answers – and it is the opposite of Extreme Realism. Nominalism is entirely a modern development and was never held by any medieval philosopher. Hobbes and the two Mills are wellknown examples of Nominalists. Nominalism is the view that all external reality is individual and therefore any representation of it must be individual. According to this view, the mind apprehends individuals through individual sense impressions and represents them by individual mental images. The argument is that, because groups of individuals seem to resemble each other in certain qualities, we classify the individuals under a common name. This reveals the nominalist view that only names (or, more generally, words) are universal, “for the things named, are every one of them singular and individual.”

There are some problems about universals which are epistemological in nature, centered around the inclusive question of what the grounds are, if any, for maintaining that the use of general terms can be understood only on the assumption that at least some of them stand for universals. According to Nagel and Brandt,¹⁰ philosophers who deal with the question usually do so discussing a

⁹ A.D. Woozley, “Universals,” in P. Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1972)

¹⁰ E. Nagel and R.B. Brandt, *Meaning and Knowledge: Systematic Readings in Epistemology*.

cluster of more specific ones, including some that are partly if not entirely questions for experimental psychology. The following six questions will do for our purpose: (1) What function (or functions) do general terms perform in the acquisition of knowledge and the communication of thought? (2) What are the prerequisites involving sensory or introspective experience, if any, for the ability to use general terms and understand their connotations? (3) What mental occurrences are associated with the use of general terms, and how do images, ideas, or other psychic events, which are all particular existents, achieve generality of reference? (4) Does the use of general terms presuppose that the things of which they are correctly predicated possess an identical common character, or is it possible to account for the use of general terms on the supposition that their predication involves only observations of resemblances between things and no commitment at any point to the existence of common character? (5) Are there criteria for determining unambiguously whether or not a statement implies anything concerning the reality of universals? (6) Are assumptions about the existence of universals or other abstract entities comparable to scientific theories that postulate the existence of “unobservable” entities (such as electrons), and in any case, on what grounds is the validity or acceptability of such assumptions to be assessed?

Relativism

From the Sophist Protagoras, as quoted by Plato, comes the first clear statement of relativism in philosophy, saying that: the way things appear to me, in that way they exist for me; and the way things appear to you, in that way they exist for you.¹¹ Thus, however I see things, that is actually true for me. If you see things differently, then that is true for you. There is no separate or objective truth apart from how each individual happens to see things. Consequently, Protagoras says, there is no such thing as falsehood. Unfortunately, this would make Protagoras’s own profession meaningless, since his task is to teach people how to persuade others of their own beliefs. It would be strange to tell others that what they believe is true, but that they should accept what you say nevertheless. So Protagoras

¹¹ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a.

qualified his doctrine: while whatever anyone believes is true, things that some people believe may be better than what others believe.¹²

Relativism is the idea that some elements or aspects of experience or culture are relative to, that is, dependent on, other elements or aspects. This position gives us some common statements that might be considered relativistic in nature: "That is true for you but not for me"; "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"; and, "You can't judge other cultures by the standards of your own." Some relativists claim that humans can understand and evaluate beliefs and behaviors only in terms of their historical or cultural context.

There are many forms of relativism that vary in their degree of controversy. The term often refers to "truth relativism," which is the doctrine that there are no "absolute truths," that is, that truth is always relative to some particular frame of reference, such as a language or culture. Another widespread and contentious form is "moral relativism." Hence, relativism can be contrasted with:

- Universalism – the view that facts can be discovered objectively and that they thus apply universally in situations, times, and places.
- Objectivism – the view that existence exists outside of consciousness, and value is created through conscious evaluation of reality versus one's nature.
- Intrinsicism – the view that cognitive, esthetic and ethical values are independent of human thinking.
- Absolutism – the view that beauty, truth, etc., are timeless and unchanging qualities.
- Monism – the view that, in any given area, there can be no more than one correct opinion.
- Subjectivism – the view that any philosophical or moral question has an answer that is not falsifiable, and is therefore subjective.

One argument for relativism suggests that our cognitive bias prevents us from observing anything objectively, and our notational bias will apply to whatever we can allegedly measure independently of our senses. In addition, we have a cultural bias shared with other

¹² K.L. Ross, "Relativism," at <http://www.friaesian.com/relative.htm> (retrieved 2009, 1-9).

trusted observers, which we cannot eliminate. A counterargument to this states that subjective certainty and concrete objects and causes form part of our everyday life, and that there is no great value in discarding such useful ideas as isomorphism, objectivity and a final truth.

Relativism is sometimes interpreted as saying that all points of view are equally valid, in contrast to an absolutism which argues there is but one true and correct view. In fact, relativism asserts that a particular instance Y exists only in combination with or as a by-product of a particular framework or viewpoint X, and that no framework or standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others. That is, a non-universal trait Y, like a particular practice, behavior, custom, convention, concept, belief, perception, ethics, truth, or conceptual framework, is a dependent variable influenced by the dependent variable X, in terms of a particular language, culture, historical epoch, a priori cognitive architecture, scientific framework, gender, ethnicity, status and individuality. This position accordingly is not an argument that all instances of a certain kind of framework – e.g., all languages – do not share certain basic universal commonalities that essentially define that framework and distinguish it from other frameworks. Moreover, relativism also presupposes philosophical realism in that there are actual objective things in the world that are relative to other real things. It also assumes causality, as well as a problematic web of relationships between various independent variables and the particular dependent variables that they influence.

Ethical Relativism

According to Brandt,¹³ the term ethical relativism is used to designate some ethical principles or some theory about ethical principles but, within this limitation, different authors use it quite differently. In his view, contemporary philosophers generally apply the term to some position they disagree with or consider absurd, and seldom to their own views, while social scientists, however, often classify themselves as relativists. Scholars who call themselves relativists always accept the first, second and, sometimes, the third of

¹³ R.B. Brandt, "Ethical Relativism," in P. Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1972).

the theses, described as descriptive relativism, meta-ethical relativism, and normative relativism respectively.

Descriptive Relativism

This assumes that certain cultural groups have different modes of thought, standards of reasoning, and so forth, and it is the anthropologist's task to describe, but not to evaluate the validity of these principles and practices of cultural group. It then follows that the first thesis, without which the others would lose interest, is that the values, or ethical principles, of individuals conflict in a fundamental way.

A special form of this thesis, called "cultural relativism," is that such ethical disagreements often follow cultural lines. The cultural relativist emphasizes the cultural tradition as a prime source of the individual's view and thinks that most disagreements in ethics stem from enculturation in different ethical traditions, although a relativist need not deny that some ethical disagreements among individuals arise from differences of innate constitution or personal history between the individuals.¹⁴ This explains why it is possible for an anthropologist in his or her fieldwork to be a descriptive relativist about some things that typically concern the philosopher (e.g., ethical principles) but not about others (e.g., logical principles). However, the descriptive relativist's empirical claims about epistemic principles, moral ideals and the likes, are often countered by philosophical argument that such things are universal, and they are matters explicitly concerned with the extent of, and evidence for, cultural or moral or linguistic or human universals.

The fact of the various species of descriptive relativism and empirical claims may tempt the philosopher to conclude that they are of little philosophical interest, but there are several reasons why this is not so. Let us bear in mind that certain sorts of cognitive differences between rational beings are impossible and that such differences could never be found to obtain in fact. This argument places a priori limits on what empirical inquiry could discover and what versions of descriptive relativism could be true. We also have to keep in mind the claim that actual differences between groups play a central role in some arguments for normative relativism, and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

that such arguments for normative ethical relativism often begin with claims that different groups in fact have different moral codes or ideals. Finally, the anthropologist's descriptive account of relativism helps to separate the fixed aspects of human nature from those that can vary, and so a descriptive claim that some important aspect of experience or thought does (does not) vary across groups of human beings tells us something important about human nature and the human condition.

Metaethical Relativism

According to Brandt,¹⁵ a person might accept descriptive relativism but still suppose that there is always only one correct moral appraisal of a given issue. Such a position has been widely held by non-naturalists and by some naturalists. The metaethical relativist, however, rejects this thesis and denies that there is always one correct moral evaluation. The metaethical relativist thesis is tenable only if certain views about the meaning of ethical (value) statements are rejected. For instance, "A is right" means that doing A will contribute at least as much to the happiness of sentient creatures as anything else one might do. It is therefore obvious that one and only one of the two opinions "A is right" and "A is wrong" is correct. Thus, the metaethical relativist is restricted to a certain range of theories about the meaning of ethical statements. He/she might, for instance, subscribe to some form of emotive theory, such as the view that ethical statements are not true or false at all but express the attitudes of the speaker. Or he/she might adopt the naturalist view that, "is wrong" means "belong to the class of actions toward which I tend to take up an impartial attitude of angry resentment."¹⁶ This also explains Benedict's suggestion that "is morally good" means "is customary."¹⁷

The problem posed by metaethical relativism is in relation to ethical reasoning. Today, metaethical relativists do not wish to rest their case solely on an appeal to what ethical statements mean; nor would their critics. The point of active debate is rather whether there

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ E.A. Westermarck, *Ethical Relativity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1932).

¹⁷ R. Benedict, "Anthropology and Abnormal," *Journal of General Psychology*, 10 (1934), 59-82.

is some method of ethical reasoning whose acceptance can be justified to thoughtful people with force comparable to the force with which acceptance of inductive logic can be justified. Is there any such method of ethical reasoning that can be expected in principle to show, when there is a conflict of values or ethical principles, that one and only one solution is correct in some important and relevant sense of "correct"? Metaethical relativists deny that there is any such method and their denial may take either of two forms: they may deny that there is any method of ethical reasoning that can be justified with force comparable to that with which scientific method (inductive logic) can be justified. Or they may agree that there is such a method but say that its application is quite limited, and in particular that the fullest use of it could not show, in every case of a conflict of ethical convictions or of values, that one and only one positions is correct in any important sense of "correct."¹⁸

Concerning the use of the term relativism, both in philosophy and social sciences, a more acceptable approach is the combination of descriptive relativism and metaethical relativism. Philosophers who hold this view, however, seldom label themselves "relativists," apparently because they think the term confusing in this context. There is seldom objection to "cultural relativism" as a descriptive phrase, for it can be taken to mean that a person's values are "relative" to his culture in the sense of being a function of or causally dependent on it. But if "ethical relativism" is understood in a similar way, to mean that ethical truth is relative to, in the sense of being dependent on or a function of, something (for example, a person's cultural tradition), then this term is thought to be confusing since it is being used to name a theory that essentially denies that there is such a thing as ethical "truth." It may be at times that the confusion concerning ethical relativism can be better avoided.

Suppose metaethical relativism is mistaken, and there is a single "correct" set of general ethical principles or value statements. It may still be true, and consistent with the acceptance of this "correct" set of principles, that an act that is right in some circumstances will be wrong in other circumstances. Take, for instance, the possible "correct" principle "It is always right to do what will make all affected at least as happy as they could be made by any other

¹⁸ R.B. Brandt, "Ethical Relativism."

possible action." It follows from this principle that in some situations it will be right to lie (for instance, to tell a man that he is not mortally ill when one knows he is, if he cannot bear the truth) and that in other situations it will be wrong to lie. Thus, even if metaethical relativism is false there is a sense in which the rightness of an act is relative to the circumstances or situation. The fact that the rightness of an act is relative to the circumstances in this way does not, of course, imply the truth of metaethical relativism.¹⁹

Conclusion

We may have to ask whether the debate on universalism and relativism in philosophy is ended or continues. Would a contemporary author deny the fact of universals as a reality? We leave it that there is a world of universals in the world of being and that that world of being is unchangeable, rigid, exact, delightful to the mathematician, the logician, the builder of metaphysical systems, and to all who love perfection more than life. Relativism in all its forms no doubt has its problem of being of a self-contradictory and self-defeating character.

The contemporary world must not be led to believe that there are no absolute and objective truths and values. The task is to continue to search for absolute truth and objective values, what they are, how they exist, or how we can know them better. It is obvious that we are still not one iota closer to having the answers to the questions raised. Thus, the burden of proof in the history of philosophy is to provide those answers for any claims that might be made in matters of fact or value. Socrates and Plato got off to a good start, but the defects in Plato's theory, misunderstood by Aristotle, immediately tangled up the issues in a way that still has never been properly untangled. Most philosophers would probably say today that there has been progress in understanding the issues, but then the embarrassment is that they mostly would not agree about in what the progress consists. The relativists still think that progress is to return to Protagoras's thought in the first place. What they really want is that easy out, so as not to need to face the awesome task of justifying or discovering the true nature of being and value.

¹⁹ R.B. Brandt, "Ethical Relativism."

Intercultural Philosophy: Toward an Adequate Cross Cultural Dialogue between African Philosophy and Western Philosophy

MARTIN F. ASIEGBU

Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilization* does not conceive that there is a harmonious or peaceful relationship holding between different pluralistic cultures of the East and the West, between their great religions (Islam and Christianity), or between their economies. For him, rather, any such relations are "clashes" – warfare, hostilities, and consequently, involve the utter defeat of the weak by the powerful. By doing away, in some respects, with Huntington's violent conceptual framework, globalization creates an appealing image of the world as a "global village." Other than a "cannibalization"¹ of other cultures, of systematically forcing American democracy and capitalism, morals, principles, and values of individualism and materialism on other cultures, globalization has nothing to recommend it. For its detractors, in effect, globalization is not much different from Huntington's conceptual framework of a violent relationship among civilizations.

Over and above Huntington's frame of reference and the operational concept of globalization, dialogue denotes a more promising reality for characterizing the relation between the cultural West and non-West. Where mutual dialogue rather than divergence, schism, and polarization, prevails among different cultures, interaction among them will occur on the basis of equality. If, indeed, the world is a global village, the necessity and priority of a dialogue will override any attempt to polarize. Yet, it has been a feature of history that cultural encounters rarely take place on the basis of equality. Need one refer to Western imperialism in Africa, in the Americas, or even among the Ameri-Indians? The resurgence of

¹ T. Okere, *Philosophy, Culture and Society in African Essays* (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publications, 2005), p. 60.

minority cultures, which seek a foothold in the midst of oppressive environment of majority cultures, signpost, in another way, the inequality of cultural encounters. Although the divergence of cultures, perhaps, more than anything, signals the significance of intercultural philosophy, it seems the case that, without dialogue, nothing remains of such a philosophy.

Of great significance for this inquiry is the evaluation of the content of the courses on African philosophy. At issue, in this regard are not the names or titles of various courses dealing in African philosophy, since one may discuss issues in African philosophy comparatively in a course on Western anthropology.

Targeted in this paper, rather, is the content of the courses. While the content of a course may primarily deal with European philosophy, it does not suffice for a course to comparatively mention one or two issues on African philosophy, or to discuss issues on African philosophy in the context of another course whose content focuses on Indian, Chinese, French or German philosophy. Although these are also important, they do not devote attention to issues in African philosophy. By a course content dealing with African philosophy, we intend that, whole and entire, the course content has to dwell purely on issues of African philosophy, even if it, on and off, appropriates other traditions. Although one may subsume issues of African philosophy in a course on European philosophy, it is the case that such a method, on and off, neglects major areas of African philosophy. Moreover, where these courses do not explicitly deal with some issues in question, these issues are rarely discussed as problems of African philosophy.

The resultant effect is not far-fetched: African philosophy is given a narrow content. Indeed, it is rare to find courses in African philosophy dealing with North African Patristics like Clement of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, etc., or even with the Early Egyptian Philosophy. Further, when courses bear specifically African philosophical themes as titles, lecturers may have to focus their attention more sharply on those issues. While lecturers in African philosophy concentrate on contemporary issues, they create the impression that all there is to African philosophy are contemporary issues. Should these areas receive as much attention as African socio-political philosophy, then the lopsided nature of the philosophical curriculum in the African Sub-Region may be arrested. The paper

avers that lack of works, insufficient writings, the philosophical training and inaccessible support explain, in some respects, the problems that attend the poverty of the programs of African philosophy in African universities.

For the purposes of this study, we shall examine the philosophical curriculum in some universities in Nigeria, not only to portray the paradigmatic position of Western philosophy, but also the neglect of African philosophy in such philosophical curriculum. We shall also expose the one dimensional dialogue that operates between African and Western philosophies. We begin with the Greek tradition to which Western philosophy traces its origins.

The Prestigious Greek Origins of Western Philosophy

Whereas for Zeller, "1,400 years after Emperor Justinian dissolved the Platonic Academy, the last of the Greek philosophical schools,"² Greek philosophy persisted, outpacing the Christian Medieval philosophy and Modern and Contemporary philosophy. If philosophy were always associated with various civilizations – that is not always the case – neither the Chinese nor the Indian civilizations could compare with the philosophy for which Greek civilization is known. The Chinese Taoist system not only lacks the language, argues Zeller, but also, it is more a mystic religion than philosophy. As for the Indians, who actually are taken as possessing various philosophies, where the idea of Brahman plays a similar role as Being in Western philosophy, none of the presumably philosophical views is separable from, or independent of, the Indian religion as Greek philosophy demonstrates. According to Zeller, not only have the Greeks established the basic tradition of philosophy, it is mistaken to perceive their contribution as merely reparatory to other epochs of Western philosophy.

Originally, Greek philosophy is valued in itself as "achievements in the development of man's intellectual life."³ Despite the profound insight of the philosophers of the Christian Middle Ages, the Scholastics were unable to dispense with Greek philosophy. In fact, it was the Greek spirit that salvaged philosophy from its "misunderstood Aristotelianism"; it charted the way for

² Eduard Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, rev. Dr. Wilhelm Nestle, trans. L. R. Palmer (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1883/1980), pp. 1-21.

³ *Ibid.*

Renaissance, leading eventually to modernity.⁴ What influence has the Greco-Roman culture on the development of Greek philosophy? When one mentions the Roman culture especially, one discovers that the Romans made no contribution to Greek philosophy, could boast of no new idea as theirs except appropriated from the Greeks, “clothed in Latin language and passed on to the Medieval and Modern worlds.”⁵ But for the Greeks, “freedom and independence of philosophic thought” as well as “the autonomy of Reason” would have been a late acquisition of human knowledge.⁶ Hailed as prestigious, Greek philosophy makes other philosophies and civilizations pale into insignificance. Thus understood, the entire European thought and philosophy trace their ancestry to Greek thought and philosophy.

Although a philosophy may arise from the thoughts and views of other philosophers, African philosophy, worth the name, may only develop out of African culture and African problems. The pioneer professionally-trained African philosophers pursued with zest the debate about the nature, methodology and questions of African philosophy under the shadow of Greek philosophy. European philosophers, with their enviable Greek root, discounted African philosophy as being on a par with European philosophy. Although Rorty attributes it to the fact that “the philosophical problems of Europe is a function of particular European quarrels,”⁷ one is aware that “a deeper issue” is the bone of contention: “[I]t [the question of African philosophy] is a struggle over the meaning of ‘man’ and ‘civilized human,’ and all that goes with this in the context of the political economy of the capitalized and Europeanized Western world.”⁸

European concerns, problems and quarrels are distinct from African problems, their context and culture. It is not mistaken, nor

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁷ Richard Rorty, interview by Gaurav Desai, “Stories of Difference: A Conversation with Richard Rorty,” *Sapina Bulletin* 2-3 (July–September 1993), pp. 23-45.

⁸ L. Outlaw, “‘African Philosophy’: Deconstructive and Reconstructive Challenges,” *African Philosophy*, vol. 5, *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey*, Guttorn Floistad, ed. (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), p. 11.

incidental, according to Serequeberhan, that African philosophy arose at a time when other currents like hermeneutics, deconstruction and other context-related philosophical views were making rounds in philosophy. These currents were inspired by the political situation of the world at the time. And so, culture provides the context of many a philosophy; philosophy is a question of identity.

Philosophy: An Issue of Identity in Spite of Interculturality

Much as philosophy is an attempt by an individual to reflect on the basic symbols and other materials of his culture, to come to grips with reality, situated as he/she is within a particular context (a culture), a specific philosophy portrays the influences of its cultural background. By nature, therefore, philosophy is culture-bound. It is always wedded to a definite culture. Just as Greek philosophy developed from within Greek culture, and the Pre-Socratics, as Greeks, busied themselves with the ultimate basis of reality, so also did the Athenian Greek Socrates, as portrayed in Plato's *Dialogues*, develop his philosophy and, this time, occupied himself with the question of morality, of justice in the state, of virtue, etc.

While various cultures and entities which constituted Europe – the different ethnicities, folks, and cultures – all trace their origins to the Greek culture, Africa, despite the overarching challenge of Western imperialism, still maintains her culture. To be truly African, African philosophy has to arise from its culture per se. It must involve individuals engaging in self-reflection in a critical way about their culture. If, by culture, one means to refer to such symbols as language, artifacts, mode of dress, thought pattern and manner of speech, lifestyle, worldview, myths and beliefs, religion and socio-political institutions, etc., then African philosophy entails an individual reflecting critically on these symbols. It implies interrogating these symbols. Where we follow Weizaeker's view⁹ to characterize philosophy as "asking further questions" (or the German expression, "weiter fragen"), questioning further and never stopping at questioning, then African philosophy entails such questioning at depth level.

⁹ Cited in T. Okere, *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of Its Possibility* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983).

Really, African culture, at present, comprehends more than African past. It goes further to incorporate the external influences, that is to say, Western influences. Consequently, when one refers to African culture, there is always a duality that springs into view: the traditional African past and the modern dimension – the external influences of the West that antedate the African past. The modern dimension typifies decades of Western imperialism, colonial rule, slavery and their attendant indignities, and man's inhumanity to man. It implicates the socio-economic and political problems that the external influences generated. These "essential problems" constitute, according to Serequeberhan, "the existential lived concerns"¹⁰ of the African and his culture. To sunder this culture into two, preferring the one to the other, or denying any aspect as a significant dimension of African culture, does violence to the same culture.

When one refers to African philosophy, one does not refer to a duality of purposes, of two different kinds of philosophy – one is referring to "a body of texts directed at philosophically engaging African concerns," on the one hand, and the other to "documenting the implicit philosophies and worldviews of ethnic Africans."¹¹ One is largely mistaken if, by "African philosophy," one intends a documentation of popular beliefs, worldviews, cultural artifacts, lifestyle, religious myths and beliefs, language and other symbols of a culture in the hope that one, by doing so, would compel philosophers of different persuasions to refer to such a project as "philosophy," much in the manner in which we speak of Greek philosophy. Known widely by Hountondji's term, "ethnophilosophy," such a documentation indexes one of the major "false roads"¹² to African philosophy, since it rarely leads to philosophy per se. It is a route never to be taken in African philosophy. This is because ethnophilosophy does not signpost real African identity. Just as African culture consists of symbols and other aspects of the culture, which could be interpreted, critically reflected upon by individuals, so also do other cultures. Africans do not have a monopoly of them. These various aspects of a culture are no

¹⁰ T. Serequeberhan, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), p. xx.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

¹² T. Okere, *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of Its Possibility*, p. 128.

philosophy just by denominating them, or, by assembling them together. They remain mere objects for philosophizing.

In an epoch-making controversy, African philosophers have been disputing one another on the status of ethnophilosophy as a trend in African philosophy, a controversy that still divides them along a rich spectrum of positions. If a mere documentation of symbols does not constitute African philosophy, then African philosophy has to be considered as “a body of texts directed at philosophically engaging African concerns.”¹³ These concerns are no more than “African problems”; that is to say, “the lived concerns, the questions and issues, embedded in a concrete existential-historical-political horizon that evoke questioning, that is, the discourse of African philosophy.”¹⁴ There are historical, political, socio-economic aspects to the content of these problems. The problems are not merely restricted to issues of African traditional past. Foundational as the problems of traditional society are, African philosophy – as a legitimate field of discourse – does not limit itself to Africa’s past and history.

More than this, it inquires anew into the socio-economic and political upheavals attendant upon the intrusion of the West into Africa, upheavals that have marked Africa to this day. Further, African philosophy has to grapple with the existential, the concrete, present-day African problems: problems of development, terrorism, genocide, conflicts and wars, corruption, progress and development of science and technology, and of the fact that at the turn of the third Millennium, Africa is still grappling with the teething problems of yore. The sources of African philosophy, its possible philosophical materials, abound. It is unspeakably rich. The historical circumstances which bestride contemporary African philosophy owe much to the legacy of colonialism.

African Philosophy and the Legacy of Colonialism

Tempels’ work *La philosophie bantoue* (1945) purposed to contribute to the European colonialist project – the utter domination of the African. In some basic respects, Tempels’ work recognized the metaphysical prejudice of Western traditional philosophy – that the

¹³ T. Serequeberhan, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, p. xix.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

African, the colonized, was devoid of humanity (rationality); that “European existence is isomorphic with human existence *as such*.”¹⁵ If Tempels recognized the humanity of the colonized African, it was for a singular purpose: “to better colonize (dehumanize) and Christianize him.”¹⁶ What an ambivalence! Since only a non-human can be colonized, according to Western traditional philosophy, colonialism is possible if and only if there is absence of humanity in the colonized. Colonialism indexes absence of humanity in the colonized, who, as a “savage,” was in dire need of colonialism so as to bestow humanity on him/her.¹⁷

If, in an unguarded moment and as a contribution to colonialism, Tempels subscribed to the humanity of the colonized African, then Tempels’ work exposes the phony status and claims of Western metaphysical belief about the African. Whereas ethnophilosophy views positively Tempels’ strategy, intents and purposes – recognition of African humanity, professional philosophers, however, reject his work offhand. Such a subterfuge, they maintain, serves only to pacify, mollify, and eventually circumvent both the cultural and political resistance of the African, the colonized, to the European project of domination.

European colonialism universalized the belief that the colonized was devoid of humanity. They combined it with another prejudgment that “philosophy is a privileged discourse singularly rooted in European/human existence *as such*.”¹⁸ Western philosophy of the Enlightenment sealed these aspirations and the agenda of colonialism by according it the force of speculative wisdom. The Age of Light (Enlightenment) perceived itself as liberating man, through Reason, from ignorance and darkness. It spread light to all. The emphasis on Reason defined the basic features of European philosophy: it “presupposes a single culture, a single religion, a single global ‘conformism’” – a totalitarian whole.¹⁹ In its bid to champion the rule of Reason, Enlightenment philosophy constructed a world that meant nothing but universalization of the various

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁹ Gramsci in *Ibid.*, p. 5.

dimensions of European culture, its historical, political, socio-economic aspects.

With such an attempt, European philosophy came to assume a centre stage, while all others remained at the periphery. Europe's conquest of Africa, Asia, the Americas and its eventual colonialism, created, what has been described by so many as a widely varied group of little Europes throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas. It meant a replication of European institutions and culture all through Africa. In this way, it bifurcated the Africans into two major groups: the Europeanized Africans (or what the French refer to as "les évolués") and the indigenous non-Europeanized Africans. Both were greatly marked with the impact of Western colonialism. If the pre-independence struggles of African states did anything, they succeeded in expelling the colonial master. Yet, those struggles did not face up to the Europeanized African, that carrier of a hybrid culture.

Over and above the hybrid nature of the Europeanized African, he faces a major problem – his estrangement from her roots. And this is one of the major problems of the present era – neocolonialism. Considered in this light, the worst thing that would happen to African philosophy would be to found African philosophy on the Europeanized African cultural background. Will that type of philosophy be truly African? Does it suffice to graft African philosophy on its European counterpart, and with the latter's prestigious Greek origins? Or, does one better anchor African philosophy on European philosophy, or even constitute African philosophy into what Okere refers to as a "métissage culturel"?²⁰ There is always some context to any philosophy.

Contextualization of African Philosophy

If the term "métiss" describes a "half cast," a child one of whose parents is a black African, then "métissage culturel" refers to a mélange of two cultures in which the black and white features form one whole. If a product of such a marital union is ever mindful of his identity – belonging neither here nor there – what would a mélange of African and European philosophies look like, if not neocolonialism, a loss of the African identity, an acceptance of the

²⁰ T. Okere, *African Philosophy*, p.128.

delusional metaphysical prejudice that Western traditional philosophy propagated during the colonial times? In a large measure, this would mean the African subscribing to the ideals and values of his erstwhile colonizer. This is, actually, what Owomoyela intends in his view stated below.²¹ He writes that Africans have not been the only people overrun by rampaging Europeans, but Africans are unique in their belief that their future lies in becoming, in thought, speech and habit, like their erstwhile colonizers.

The idea of a *mélange* of these philosophies – of the African obligatorily needing the European to be able really to think and reflect critically about his culture – is an importation of the one-time political ideology that sought to force African states into belonging to either the East or the West, to tend towards either the Capitalist America (the West) or the Communist Russia (the East). So great was the degree of fright that gripped the world at the Cold War era that one was thought incapable of existing on one's own. Not worse is this idea still when it is transferred to the area of knowledge, precisely philosophy. For, in this case, it implies utter subjection to one "global," (universalized) European culture such that any difference is viewed purely negatively. Destroying any attempt at originality, the African would be made to relive, all over again, the horrible lot of the Europeanized Africans, *les évolués*, who existed inauthentically, to employ Heidegger's existential terminology. Would "African philosophy," so elaborated, derive from which local culture – African?

One wonders why the African would be incapable of philosophizing, when any other could! The romance of the African leaders and thinkers with Marxism is illustrative of the eventual failure of an "unholy union" of African and European philosophies. The enthusiasm with which some African leaders and thinkers embraced Marxism at the wake of independence of African states remains intriguing. Yet, the consequent failure of that ideology is a pointer to a similar fate awaiting the coalition of African and European philosophies. Regardless of the differences of culture and the demands of Marxism, African politicians and thinkers like Nkrumah, Senghor, Hountondji, Nwala, Alozie, Nzimiro, etc. all

²¹ O. Owomoyela, *The African Difference: Discourse on Africanity and Relativity of Culture* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 37.

adopted, in some measure, “Africanized” Marxism as the sole liberating ideology for Africa. Some African thinkers were declared Marxists, indeed. With the demise of Communism, nearly all African Marxists disappeared, and nothing is left of their rhetoric or fiery political ramblings. The collapse of the Marxist ideology depicts their later disappointment. Ever before their embrace of that ideology, little did they realize the hollowness of that ideology vis-à-vis African liberation struggles. Aimé Césaire best represents the fundamental failure of that ideology for Africa when he writes: “I never thought for a moment that our emancipation could come from the right – that’s impossible...our liberation placed us on the left, but [we]...refused to see the black [African] question as simply a social [economic] question...after all we are dealing with the only race which is denied even the notion of humanity.”²² One wonders why the African would be incapable of philosophizing, when any other could! African philosophy indicates Africa’s attempt at Africa’s self-determination, self-assertion, and respect, what with the trauma of a disgraced, “broken and ambiguous cultural heritage.”²³

The philosophical curricula in some Universities of the West African Sub-region betray an overly paradigmatic status of Western philosophy.

African Philosophy in West African Sub-Region: Statistics

The Institute of Missiology Missio – SECAM/SCEAM organized a seminar for a select group of African experts on the contextualization of philosophy and theology curriculum in Africa. The seminar took place in Kumasi, Ghana in 2002.²⁴ Certainly, the neglect of African theological and philosophical curriculum and, by implication, African cultural heritage necessitated the convening of experts to review theology and philosophy programs in the seminaries and other Catholic Institutes of Higher Learning in Africa. Oguejiofor provides the *status questionis* of African philosophy in the Catholic seminaries and other Higher Institutes of

²² Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), pp. 78-79.

²³ T. Serequeberhan, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, p. 9.

²⁴ L. G. Mlilounmill and N. Y. Soédé, *Doing Theology and Philosophy in the African Context* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2003).

Learning in Nigeria – West Africa. This is his summary of the state of affairs. He writes:

The Dominican Institute has 35 core philosophy courses, two of which are on African philosophy (Dominican Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Ibadan 1999-2000). SS. Peter and Paul Seminary, Ibadan offers 47 courses, 4 are on African philosophy (Brochure: Dominican Institute of Philosophy and theology, Ibadan, Nigeria. 1999-2002); Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, offers 41 courses, and seven of these are on African philosophy (Bigard Memorial Seminary, Program of Philosophy in Affiliation with the University of Ibadan, Enugu, 1998).²⁵

Another case worthy of mention here is the Catholic Institute of West Africa's B.Th program, specifically, its B.Th program, which "integrates theological courses with philosophical courses and courses in other disciplines."²⁶ The program fields 68 courses; 7 of these are philosophy courses and only one of these courses is on African philosophy (in fact, a course borrowed from the University of Port Harcourt).

By "courses on African philosophy," Oguejiofor means that the entire course content deals with African philosophy, even if problems of African philosophy could form a subject of discussion in other courses not devoted to African philosophy. This neglect of African philosophy is not restricted to the Seminaries. A glance at the philosophical curriculum in Nigeria confirms this neglect. Below are the statistics of the courses on African and European philosophies: The Philosophy Unit of the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy of the University of Calabar offers 49 courses in all. However, only 3 courses deal explicitly with African philosophy from first degree through Masters to the doctorate level.²⁷

²⁵ J.O. Oguejiofor, "Doing Philosophy in Africa Today: Reflections and Practical Suggestions," in L. G. Mlilo and N. Y. Soédé, eds., *Doing Theology and Philosophy in the African Context* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO Verlag fuer Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2003), pp. 125-136.

²⁶ Catholic Institute of West Africa Faculty of Theology, *Academic Program for B.Th, STL (M.Th) Degrees, 2001-2002*, p. 36.

²⁷ *Departmental Handbook, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, 1997.*

Nwala argues that the Department of Philosophy at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, initiated lectures in African philosophy at the inception of the great debate.²⁸ Its philosophical curriculum at the time consisted of, among other courses, two initial courses in African philosophy (1971/1972), ever before any other Department of philosophy of other Nigerian Universities introduced similar courses in their curricula. At present, the Department of Philosophy of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, offers 8 obligatory courses in African philosophy and 6 electives or options, also in African philosophy.²⁹ In all, this Department of Philosophy, however, offers a total of 53 core philosophy courses.³⁰

The Department of Philosophy of the University of Ibadan features 44 courses, but only 4 of them focus on African philosophy.³¹ Like the Department of Philosophy of the University of Ibadan, that of the University of Uyo offers 44 courses. Only 2 courses explicitly deal with African philosophy. Of these, one is titled "Nigerian Peoples and Culture," while the other discusses the relation of Marxism to the Third World.³²

Imo State University, Owerri, offers only 2 courses in African philosophy out of a total of 60 courses (Individual Communication). Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, offers 60 courses in philosophy in first degree. But only 3 of them centre on African philosophy.³³ Could it all be traced to the formation of students?

²⁸ T. U. Nwala, "Emergence of Contemporary African Philosophy," *Journal of Liberal Studies* 10, no. 2 (Dec.), 9-16; T. U. Nwala, "The Otonti Nduka Mandate: From Tradition to Modernity. An Inaugural Lecture," University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2007, 31-45.

²⁹ *University of Nigeria Nsukka Academic Calendar* (Enugu: Rainbow Paper Mill, 2004-2008).

³⁰ University of Nigeria Nsukka Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy, *Revised Undergraduate Academic Programme*, 2004.

³¹ University of Ibadan Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, *Students Information Handbook*, 2000-2002.

³² The Office of the Head of Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, Uyo – Nigeria, *Students' Handbook*, 2008/2009.

³³ Faculty of Arts, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, *Information Hand-Book*, 2004-2005, pp. 175-188.

Formation in African Philosophy

It is largely the case that, without prejudice to the early pioneer Western-trained professional philosophers, most students of African philosophy study in African universities. That is to say, they major in African philosophy in those African Universities that hardly offer a good number of courses in African philosophy itself. Given a programme of philosophy overwhelmingly charged (overcharged!) with European philosophy, students of African philosophy, it appears, do not have many possibilities open to them. A good number of them employ European philosophy as a stepping stone to accede to African philosophy, whereas others, who embark on the study of African philosophy, do so, often, without knowledgeable supervisors.

At doctorate levels, they do no more than model African philosophy on European philosophy. One has had a good cause to come upon some doctorate dissertations with these or similar titles: "Friendship in Aristotle: A Study in African Philosophy"; "An African Interpretation of Hegel's philosophy"; "An Inquiry into Schopenhauer's Philosophy and Its Relevance to Africa." Consisting of two parts, these dissertations betray a highly critical stance toward European philosophy, while failing to evince a critical attitude in the second part of the dissertation dealing with African issues. The effects of poor grounding in African philosophy hinder students from producing creative and original works that are continued in post-doctoral researches.

Okere's dissertation, "Can there Be an African Philosophy? A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of Its Possibility," later published in 1983 as *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of Its Possibility*, stands out above such uninspiring works in African philosophy. Relying on the hermeneutic tradition in European Philosophy, Okere was able to develop a new current in African philosophy – the hermeneutical current of thought. Yet, Okere read at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, which, at the time, conducted nearly no courses on African philosophy. But Okere was focused on his topic from his first degree through his Masters to his doctorate.

If commitment and interest are pivotal in any pursuit, more so are they in philosophical studies. This is true of a good number of leading African philosophers, who, nonetheless, majored in

European philosophy. Although these philosophers would make significant contributions to Western philosophy, they abandoned their area of specialization to embrace African philosophy. They, out of interest and commitment, turned to African philosophy. Today, they are experts in that field. Through perseveringly laborious effort and for a long period of time, they applied themselves to perusing any material dealing on African philosophy and Africa. In this way, they have made original contributions to African philosophy.

It is not uncommon for some students of African philosophy to pursue their studies further in European and American Universities. Apart from the difficulty of language and adjustment to a new environment, these students find it relatively easy to fit in with the philosophical curricula in these universities. While different universities maintain a common culture, universities possess, nonetheless, certain peculiarities. Studying in the University of Sorbonne is quite different from studying at Oxford University, London. With regard to philosophy, for instance, students of philosophy in Africa easily fit in as if they were studying in their own cultural environment. This is an eloquent proof of the pride of place that European philosophy occupies in Africa. However, were a European to study African philosophy in Africa, it would be definitely different since he lacked a previous study of this brand of philosophy in a European university. He would be delving into a completely new field.

The Great Debate about the Nature of African Philosophy

All there is to African philosophy is not the great debate. To perceive African philosophy in such a light not only misrepresents it, but also does it a disservice. Although the major contention of the debate had to do with the question of the identity of the African, the differences in points of view of different schools of thought portray the central role that Western conception of philosophy occupies in philosophizing in Africa. Whereas ethnophilosophy tended to refer to any aspect of African culture as philosophy, thereby bastardising the notion of philosophy, the sage school of thought argued that the likes of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc. inhabited Africa. As a result, their thoughts stand on the same platform as the philosophical views of the Greek philosophers, or any philosopher at that.

If these two schools of thought diverged by a significant nuance, the professional school stands over the two in its insistence that “philosophy,” so conceived by the ethnophilosophical school, is “non-Western.” The idea of philosophy, which the professional school bandies about, was deemed too Western. This is often attributed to the training of the pioneers and members of the School. Just as their training, so their conception of philosophy – all too Western! While the Hermeneutic current views the whole of philosophy as interpretation, which interpretation any culture may appropriate, critics of Africa hold the view that but for its great civilization, Ancient Egypt would all too readily be classed as a part and parcel of Africa, a view that has brought them into conflict with thinkers like Diop and Obenga.

But works on African philosophy are wont to devote much space to this debate, which debate nearly obstructed the development of this philosophy. One has only to reflect a while to behold the rich unaccessed areas in African philosophy, areas yet to be explored. There is the whole gamut of Egyptian philosophy that has, long since, remained inaccessible to students. The ancient Egyptian civilization, its cosmology, theodicy, ethics, and even its philosophy of creation³⁴ are yet to be explored. Possible areas of study in African philosophy, which appear to be really forgotten, abound.

Dimensions of African Philosophy Rarely Thought

For its overview of the development of different currents of thought, and a bird’s eye view of a whole length and breadth of philosophy at a “glance,” a book that recounts a history of African philosophy is indispensable. Moreover, it helps arrest the situation in African philosophy whereby thinkers publish their works in all imaginable journals of philosophy, dispatched to the four ends of the world. In such a work, dimensions to African philosophy, which are rarely thrust to the fore, like the place of the *North African Patristics*, like Clement of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, etc., are rarely mentioned. Yet, they require in-depth study.

³⁴ J.O. Oguejiofor, “Proposals for a More Contextual Philosophy Programme,” in L. G. Mlilo and N. Y. Soédé, eds., *Doing Theology and Philosophy in the African Context* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO Verlag fuer Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2003), pp. 165-178.

Islamic philosophers in Africa are rarely mentioned in lectures in African philosophy, much less studied for their interesting doctrines, especially in the context of the oft-religious hostilities in Africa. Philosophers like Ibn Khaldun of Tunisia are worth our while. *Ethiopian Philosophy* (9th c. to modern times) is yet another unexplored area. The history of this ancient kingdom and its civilization, its philosophers including Walda Heyatt, Zera Yacob, etc., make an interesting study. Other areas include African socio-political theories, the moral philosophy (African theories of justice), African philosophy and the paranormal (African magic), and African feminist philosophies. Thus, there is an avalanche of areas of interest in African philosophy, areas yet to be discussed and explored! Dialogue between Western and African philosophy is, after all, possible and underway.

African and Western Philosophies in Dialogue: Improved Commitments

Considered as one of the disciplines studied in a university,³⁵ African philosophy is relatively recent, and its early beginnings are traceable to the debate of the 1970s about its nature and existence,³⁶ however, as “a set of reflective practices rooted in culture and reason, which rigorously explicate a life-world.” African philosophy is ancient, going back to the traditional African society, where certainly there existed some unsung Socrates, Platos, and Aristotles.³⁷ In the first sense of philosophy as a university discipline, African philosophy harbours, at its heart, some tension that originated with the encounter between African and the West. In this light, African philosophy is deemed to have been rooted in anti-colonial struggles which sought to reclaim Africa’s lost identity. That thinkers, since the Enlightenment, were dismissive, have been dismissive of Africa “as a foil against which all reason could be contrasted,”³⁸ is illustrated in the works of Hume, Hegel, and Kant.

³⁵ T. Okere, *Philosophy, Culture and Society in African Essays*.

³⁶ T.U. Nwala, *Critical Review of the Great Debate on African Philosophy 1970-1990* (Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 1992).

³⁷ T. Okere, *Philosophy, Culture and Society in African Essays*.

³⁸ B. Janz, “African Philosophy,” accessed May 31, 2010, <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/papers/37AfPhil.pdf>.

There is a further tension. It operates in the name of this philosophy – “African philosophy.” Where the lively discussion of universals and particulars portrays the particularity of African philosophy, it casts Western (European) philosophy into an overarching universal mode. Thus, a divide between the universal and the particular sidelines African philosophy (a particular) vis-à-vis the universal – Western philosophy. It does not suffice to contrast African philosophy with Continental, regional, or even specific country’s philosophies like British philosophy, French philosophy, or even German philosophy to resolve the problem. In contrast to African philosophy, these philosophies display an avalanche of historically attested texts, ideas and views of centuries-old thinkers. Such a critical stance and historical texts are a luxury that the orality of African tradition and ethnophilosophic texts, in their uncritical perspective, does not permit.

Yet, ever since its peculiar historical origins, African philosophy has never ceased to engage in cross-cultural dialogue – with Western philosophy, with philosophies of Afro-American Diaspora. One need not forget the inter-ethnic, linguistic perspectives to this philosophy, which, as dimensions of African philosophy, interrelate and dialogue with one another. Such dimensions include the Igbo, the Yoruba, the Akan, the Hausa, etc. And so, ever before the challenge of globalization, which seeks to make the world into a global village, African philosophy was already involved in cross-cultural dialogue with diverse cultures.

Could one really interpret the relation between African and Western philosophies as an intercultural dialogue? If the Enlightenment thinkers and anthropologists were often dismissive of Africa, if the origins of contemporary African philosophy is rooted in the identity crisis, which the encounter with the West generated, then intercultural exchange between African and Western philosophy hardly proceeded as it should. To hold true, a cross cultural dialogue entails “mutual recognition and respect among cultures,”³⁹ according to which no one culture in particular claims “a priori superiority in point of rationality,”⁴⁰ adopting “a commitment

³⁹ P. Healy, “Self-Other Relations and the Rationality of Cultures,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 26, no. 6 (2000), pp. 61-83.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

to dialogical equality,"⁴¹ and perceiving the Other as "co-subjects"⁴² in a cross cultural dialogue.

If one goes by these principles of intercultural dialogue, then there really was no such commitment between African and Western philosophies. Thus, if, today, the situation has improved considerably, one has to note that, in the past, it proved an uphill task, nay impossible, to defend even a doctoral dissertation on an African philosophical theme in some European Universities. This was because of the widespread view that African philosophy never existed!

Although "[i]n North America, it is not unusual for someone to have a BA with a philosophy major without ever having read or discussed a nonwestern [sic] philosopher,"⁴³ the reception, which North American universities reserved African philosophy, has equally improved for good. Quite a number of African philosophers teach African philosophy in North American universities. Wiredu makes this same point. He writes, "I have been working in the United States, and there I get called upon, and I get the opportunity, to teach and discuss African philosophy more than when I was in Africa. When I was in Ghana, there were any number of people who could teach African philosophy."

The enhanced reception of African philosophy in North America notwithstanding, works of African philosophers are on and off classed as mere "literatures," or what is popularly known as "novels." Moreover, "comparative philosophers find themselves on the defensive as they attempt to insert elements of nonwestern [sic] philosophical thinking into an essentially western [sic] curriculum."⁴⁴ This speaks volumes, nonetheless, of the present state of intercultural philosophy (dialogue with African philosophy) in North Africa as well as for the dialogue between African and Western philosophies.

In the arrangement of the philosophical curriculum in Sub-Saharan Africa, Western philosophy occupies a pride of place. In contrast to what obtains in some North African universities, where the philosophical curriculum is profoundly Western, African

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴³ Karsten Struhl, "No More Philosophy without Cross-Cultural Philosophy," *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 4 (April 2010), pp. 287–295.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

philosophers are wont to replicate the tradition and philosophical styles of the philosophers of their erstwhile colonialists. The Anglo-Saxon philosophy finds more ready, fertile land in Anglophone West Africa than it does in Francophone Africa. Further, African philosophers readily embrace the philosophical curriculum of the West such that courses in African philosophy become exceptions rather than the rule. Hence, an African student of philosophy easily fits into a philosophical curriculum in any Western University as much as he feels at home in a similar curriculum of study in his home country in Africa.

Conclusion

The rise of African philosophy and other kinds of philosophy – Indian, Confucian, South American philosophies – challenges the absolutist and paradigmatic status of Western philosophy⁴⁵ that paraded herself about as the sole worthwhile philosophy. Western philosophy was typically the philosophy per se, tracing her pedigree to the origins of the prestigious Greek philosophy and thought, culture and tradition. This absolutist position of Western philosophy appears markedly in the philosophical curricula in Africa, despite the rise of African philosophy. The historical conditions which originated contemporary African philosophy provoked the identity crisis of the African, to which identity problem contemporary African philosophy attempted to respond.

That African philosophers perceived the challenge of the colonial roots of contemporary African philosophy creatively as an invitation to a profound search for meaning, an impulse to critically reflect on the foundations of the life and society of the African, depicts one of the greatest contributions of philosophy in Africa.⁴⁶

In this study, we examined the likelihood of a genuine cross cultural dialogue between African and Western philosophies. Although this dialogue has been functional since the origins of contemporary African philosophy, it has always proceeded in a lopsided manner that sees Western philosophy occupy a paradigmatic position, to the utter neglect of African philosophy. However, it seems the case that the apparent neglect of African

⁴⁵ T. Okere, *Philosophy, Culture and Society in African Essays*, p. vii; T. Serequeberhan, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ B. B. Janz, "African Philosophy."

philosophy is traceable to the formation of the lecturers and students, who focus mainly on the contemporary issues in African philosophy. In addition, we did mention the creative output in terms of publications of original works in African philosophy. These reasons, it appears, explain the one dimensional aspect of the dialogue between African and Western philosophies.

Intercultural Philosophy – A Quest for Unity in Diversity: What Can African Languages Contribute?

BENJAMIN EWELU

Introduction

The ideas expressed by Ram Adhar Mall in his book entitled *Intercultural Philosophy*, which believes that each culture has something to contribute to the general richness of world philosophy, made my mind think deeply on the fate of many African languages that are gradually dwindling with their richness, and some of them dying off. Intercultural philosophy strongly brings it to our awareness that each culture is part and parcel of the world richness. There is no culture that has nothing to contribute. To relegate any culture to the background or, worse still, to allow it to die, is to lose some part from the deposit of the universal wealth. Language, as we know, is an essential element of each culture and this is “a universal fact about language.”¹ The situation in which almost all the African countries are compelled by the fact of colonization and neo-colonization to discuss their cultures in European languages instead of in the languages that are part and parcel of the cultures in question is an unhealthy situation. This essay, therefore, argues that for the philosophical riches of African cultures to be harnessed to its maximum, such riches were better forwarded in African languages, which are essential elements of African cultures.

Intercultural Philosophy

Intercultural philosophy is a new wave in philosophy set in motion by a German thinker, a professor of philosophy at the University of Trier, by name Ram Adhar Mall. It is the basic assumption of intercultural philosophy that there is “no pure own culture just as there is no pure other culture.” That is to say that contacts between different cultures are intricate and complex, and

¹ R.A. Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

can be traced back into the past almost endlessly. Thus, there is need for intercultural inquiries. In man's quest for truth, no culture is of greater value; in other words, all cultures are of equal value.

Mall holds, and correctly so, that philosophy is a product of culture, and every culture carries philosophy within it – some in form of abstract logical thought, some in poems and others in myth or in proverbs. Intercultural philosophy frowns at any attempt to present any particular form of philosophy as an absolute and universal philosophy. Intercultural philosophy is a call for openness and tolerance to the other, for nobody has it all. Thus, the European philosophical pride that praises the European *Spirit* (Hegel and Heidegger) and the Japanese intellectual movement known as *nihonjinron* that upholds the uniqueness and the incommunicability of the Japanese thoughts² are improper. Such an attitude upholds irrational pride, non-readiness to dialogue and intellectual dogmatism.

Surely, there are different forms of philosophy. Thus, we talk of Western philosophy, Indian philosophy, Continental philosophy, Anglo-Saxon philosophy, African philosophy, et cetera. These are instances of the same generic concept – philosophy. Their differences notwithstanding, there is the *philosophia perennis*. These different philosophies are but species of the same genus. Intercultural philosophy, therefore, encourages each culture to contribute its own aspect of philosophy to the general world of philosophy, persuades each philosophy to accept other philosophies in order to enrich itself and the general philosophy. Intercultural perspective, therefore, enlarges and diversifies. It pursues unity without uniformity. It tries to free humans from myopism and dogmatism.

Languages and the Danger of Uniformity

There are thinkers who are of the opinion that a universal language, that is to say a language understood by all, would solve many problems arising from the difficulty of communication between nations and peoples. The sole aim of such people is the simplification of communication. They do not think of what human race would lose were all the diverse languages of the world to be strangled so as to allow a universal world language to emerge. This

² *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 22, s.v. "Language," p. 563.

is a call for uniformity instead of unity in diversity, which intercultural philosophy proposes.

Leibniz (1646-1716) is known for calling for the pulling down of the Tower of Babel³ by “fixing significations” and commonly “agreeing on them.”⁴ This is a call for an invention of neutral universal language. Attempts have been made in this line to invent an artificial language that would serve as international language. The early attempts were made in the 17th century by the Scottish teacher George Dalgarno and the English bishop John Wilkins. Their attempts did not yield much result. Another known attempt is that of the German priest J. M. Schleyer who, in 1880, launched his international auxiliary language known as *Volapük*. This artificial language spread across some civilized countries and gained many speakers and devotees. This fast and wide spread of *Volapük*, instead of being an advantage, proved to be a disadvantage for the artificial language. As the number of its speakers increased and as the area where it is spoken broadened, *Volapük*, which is meant to be an international language, split into diverse dialects. *Volapük*, therefore, crumbled “into a new Babel of its own.”⁵ In 1887, the time *Volapük* was still spreading, the Russian physician L. L. Zamenhof launched another artificial international language which he called *Esperanto* which survives up to date. *Esperanto* is meant to be easy enough for anybody already conversant with any of the European languages. It has a highly simplified grammar. All verbs are regular and all the plurals are formed by the simple addition of *oj* at the end of the singular form. With regard to phonetics, its orthography is phonetic, that is to say that each word is pronounced the way it is written, e.g. *amiko* for friend. Although *Esperanto* is said to have claimed about eight million users in 1965,⁶ its actual speakers today in different parts of the world is estimated only at about one hundred thousand.⁷ More than 100 periodicals are published in

³ P.N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (Oxford: Routledge, 1986).

⁴ This refers to the Biblical Tower of Babel in Genesis 11: 1-9 where God is said to have confused the language of the world, which, before then, was but just one.

⁵ G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, op. cit., Bk. III, chap. ix.

⁶ *Quiddities: An Intermittently Philosophical Dictionary*, s.v. “Artificial Languages” (London: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 8 -12.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Esperanto and more than 30,000 books have been published in this artificial language. Other artificial languages include *Ido* by Louis Couturat (1907) which is a version of Esperanto, and the *Interlingua* invented by Guisepepe Peano (1903) which is based on classical Latin. Still, there is the artificial language of mathematical logic constructed by B. Russell and A. Whitehead and published in the work they entitled *Principia Mathematica* (1903). This is a formalized sign language. In line with Whitehead and Russell, there are later formal languages for computer programming like Fortran, Loglan, Algol, Lisp, Smalltalk, Prolog, Visica, and Eurisko. The formal languages of logicians and computer scientists, unlike the other artificial languages mentioned above before them, are never meant to be spoken. They were meant to be the form of language best suitable for precise and scientific thinking and for expressing such a thought. To what extent is this supposition true? This we shall see in the subchapter that follows immediately.

The Universality of Language

The ambition of the “universal language” is to pull down the Tower of Babel, to invent a language which would be spoken and understood by all. The idea of inventing one universal language for all is based on the hypothesis of the universal grammar.⁸ This hypothesis holds that there is universal grammatical structure in the mind of every *homo sapiens*, a structure which enables him to learn as a native speaker, no matter which language he is exposed to within the early ages of his life, say before the age of seven. All the languages of the world are believed to be in accordance with this universal grammar.⁹

Chomsky, for instance, in his writings, especially in his 1980 publication – *Rules and Representations* – defends the universal character and structure of all the natural languages.¹⁰ According to

⁸ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 4, 15th edition, 1994.

⁹ Cf. N. Chomsky, *Reflections on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, however, denies the view that there is any essential element common to all the languages. He writes: “Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all – but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this

him, in their deep structure, all languages are identical. The differences between them are only on their surface structures. Chomsky and all the upholders of such a theory are, to a certain extent, quite correct. There are always some shared meanings and some language characteristics and structures that make it at all possible for people of different languages to communicate at the first instance they come in contact without any commonly shared natural language. The universal grammar is on the level of the genetic characteristic of language. What is the universal grammar is, in my own opinion, the natural disposition (call it faculty) of man as *animalis rationalis* and *homo loquens* to understand and use language. In the first encounter between people of different languages, what makes communication possible between them is fundamentally this natural disposition. In addition to this natural language faculty, there are the concrete external forms of language like the facial expressions, gestures and other forms of body language, the actions that follow some sounds, etc., which make it possible for such people to communicate (though not without much difficulty) in their first meeting.

The belief in the universality of the human language has made some thinkers to postulate one common origin of all the diverse human languages. Some go to the extent of saying that Hebrew is the mother of all world languages. The theory of the common ancestry of the world languages has many convincing facts against it. The classification of the world language, for example, reveals that there is nothing common to all the languages that would make one suspect a common origin. The actual structures of the existing languages show diversity rather than unity of grammatical structures. The same is the case with regard to their phonetics. What is common to all the languages is that each of them is means of thought and communication, and commands the ability to serve as a means of producing an infinite number of sentences. Each language can serve for its speaker as a means of perceiving reality and of expressing his

relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all 'language'" (p. 65). What exists between the world languages are only certain *relations* and *similarities* ("family resemblances," p. 67). There is no essential character of all the languages of the world. It is, therefore, a fundamental mistake to think of a universal language which would be constructed in accordance with this essential and universal nature of all languages.

perceptions. Before a given experience, were there to be a representative for each of about 6000 languages of the world, there would be the same number of linguistic signs for representing this same one experience as there are languages. What is common here is the experience itself and not any linguistic factor, though each person is able to appreciate this experience because he is linguistically endowed. Another common factor is that every language has a system of grammar, of phonetics and a set of vocabularies. But then it is in these that the diversity of the languages consists. In short, what is universal is the faculty of language which is manifested in a diversified ways by different natural languages.¹¹

Points of Divergence between the Languages

Where differences between languages consist are in their grammatical structures (syntax), system of sound (phonetic) and in their set of words (lexical contents).

Syntax

There is no grammatical structure that can be said to apply generally to all the languages. Many languages have the syntactical subject-verb-object (SVO), as in the classical example: "The girl loves the boy." In English and in many other languages, the position of the words girl and boy are very important for the meaning of the sentence. When the two words are swapped, the meaning and the truth value of the sentence are totally changed. "The girl loves the boy" can be true while "The boy loves the girl" is false. But in certain languages, as in Latin, "The girl loves the boy" can be correctly rendered as *Puella puerum amat* (SOV) or as *Puerum puella amat* (OSV). The meaning of these Latin sentences remain constant because it is not the position of the words that determine the subject and the object, but the endings of the inflected words. In the positioning of noun and adjective, the French and the English, in most cases, do so in the opposite way; while the normal position in French is noun-adjective (NA), e.g. "*maison blanche*," in English, it is adjective-noun (AN), e.g. "white house." The structure of a German sentence is quite different from that of English or French. In German,

¹¹ N. Chomsky, *Rules and Representations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

the verb must normally come as the second item in a sentence. When there is an auxiliary verb, it takes this normal second position, and the main verb must then come last in the sentence or in the clause. In the subordinate clause, the verb must come last; even in the cases where there are many verbs, all of them must come last. This is a special syntactical structure of the German language. In English and French, for instance, the verb and its auxiliary go together except where an adverb comes in between them. The point is that, from syntactical point of view, there is no universal grammatical structure of all the languages.

Manner of the Formation of Plurals

There is a great difference in syntactical structure between African languages and Indo-European languages in the formation of plurals. While many of the Indo-European languages form their plurals by changing the endings of the singular nouns, most of the African languages do so by effecting a change at the beginning. Some nouns in African languages (especially in Igbo) remain the same both in their singular and in their plural forms. The plural of certain nouns in some African languages are completely other terms, for instance child – children in Igbo and Efik. Here are some few examples:

Table 5

| English | French | Igbo | Efik | Swahili | Kinyarwanda |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Man <i>men</i> | homme hommes | Nwoke <i>umu-nwoke</i> | Eren <i>Iren</i> | <i>Nwanaume</i> Wanaume | <i>umugabo</i> <i>abagabo</i> |
| Child <i>children</i> | Enfant enfants | Nwata <i>umu-aka</i> | Eyen <i>Ndito</i> | <i>Motto</i> Watoto | <i>umwana</i> <i>abana</i> |
| Animal animals | animal <i>animaux</i> | Anu <i>umu-anu</i> | Unam <i>mme unam</i> | <i>mnyama</i> <i>wanyama</i> | inyamaswa inyamaswa |
| Box boxes | Boite boites | Akpati akpati | Ekebe <i>mme ekebe</i> | kisanduku visanduku | <i>agasanduku</i> <i>udusanduku</i> |
| Book Books | Livre Livres | Akwukwo Akwukwo | Ñwēd <i>mme ñwēd</i> | Kitabu Vitabu | igitabo lbitabo |

Possessive Phrases and Possessive Pronouns

Indo-European languages have possessive phrases like *of, 's* (English); *de, de la, du, des* (French); *von, s* (German). In Indo-European languages, there are also the possessive pronouns like:

Table 6

| English | French | German |
|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| my | mon/ma | mein/meine |
| your (sing.) | ton/ta | dein/deine |
| his/her | son/sa | sein/seine; ihr/ihre |
| our | notre | unser/unsere |
| -- | -- | euer/eu (familiar pl.) |
| your (plural) | votre (pl.& official sing.) | Ihr/Ihre (official sing. & pl.) |
| their | leur | ihr/ihre |

In many of the African languages like Igbo, Yoruba, Duala, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, etc., there are no possessive pronouns. In Efik, there are singular possessive pronouns only: *mmi* (my), *fo* (your sing.) and *esie* (his/her/its). In the plural, the substantive pronouns serve also as possessive pronouns: *nyin* (we/our), *mbufo* (you/your pl.), *mmo* (they/their). The absence of possessive phrases and pronouns does not imply that the speakers of such languages lack the concept of possessiveness. In such languages, possessiveness is shown by the positions of words. Where the English say "The dog of Banjo" or "Banjo's dog, the Yoruba say "*Aja Banjo*"; where the French say "Le livre *de* monsieur Okolo," the Igbo say "*Akwukwo Mazi Okolo*. To indicate possessiveness, it suffices to place the possessed before the possessor. X's Y or the Y of X is simply expressed as Y X. Instead of using the possessive pronoun to indicate possessiveness, the possessed is simply positioned before ordinary pronoun of the possessor. Thus, the Igbo say something like "father you" – *nna gi* instead of "your father"; "house we" – *ulo anyi*, instead of "our house," etc. While it is the universal character of all the languages to

indicate the possessor and the possessed, the sentence structure for doing so differs from language to language.¹²

System of Gender (masculine, feminine and neuter)

We have just seen that there are no possessive pronouns in most of the African languages. Thus, the question of the gender agreement of the possessive pronouns does not arise. In the ordinary pronouns, gender differentiation is totally absent in practically all the African languages. In Igbo and Yoruba languages, for example, only a pronoun “O” stands for English he/she/it, French *il/elle*, German *er/sie/es*. Thus, the Yoruba sentence “O mbo” could mean “He, she or it is coming”;¹³ and the Igbo sentence “O hula ya” could mean “He, she or it has seen him, her or it.” This means that the problem of the choice of pronoun while addressing a gathering of mixed genders does not arise in many African languages. On the other hand, it raises the problem of ambiguity when pronouns in these languages are to be translated into languages that distinguish the three genders in the pronouns.

Non-conjugated Verbs

Verbs in many of the African languages are not conjugated. A verb remains unchanged whether it applies to first person, second person or third person, and whether it applies to the singular or plural form of these persons. There are no first person, second person, third person forms, and there are no singular and plural forms of a verb. The present indicative of the verb *iri* (to eat) illustrates the point I am making here.

Table 7

| <i>English</i> | <i>French</i> | <i>Igbo</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------|
| I eat | je mange | M na-eri |
| you eat | tu manges | I na-eri |
| he/she/it eats | il/elle mange | O na-eri |
| we eat | nous mangeons | Anyi na-eri |
| you (pl.) eat | vous mangez | Unu na-eri |
| they eat | ils/elles mangent | Ha na-eri. |

¹² Hagège, for instance, outlines different ways possessiveness can be expressed in different languages. These include: equative, attributive, existential, situative, investive, etc. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³ Cf. T.A. Awoniyi, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

One sees that it is the same form of the present indicative – *na-eri* – that runs through all the persons and numbers. Igbo verbs have different tenses like other languages, but the same form of each tense again runs through all the persons and numbers. These few examples prove the fact that on the syntactical structure, there are diversities between the natural languages of the world.

Phonetic

Sound is of much importance in all the languages, and phonology is about the speech sounds. Oral speech is based on the system of sounds to which meanings are attached. Different vocal sounds carry different meanings for those conversant with a given language. It is in the question of phonology that the divergence of languages comes out most clearly. Immediately a strange language is spoken, it registers in the ears of the people around and, in most of the cases, many turn around to look at the speaker of “something different.” The range of articulation differs from language to language, and it is this range in articulation that is partly responsible for differences in accents by those who learn a language as their second language (L2). The range of articulation in their mother tongue (L1) influences their articulation in L2. The arrangement of consonants and vowels is an important phonological factor. African languages generally do not allow consonant clusters (two consonants coming together, e.g. *str*, *br*, *sp*) except in cases where such a cluster forms just one stop as in *gb*. Most languages of Africa have vowel endings, with the known exception of Efik, which has nasal endings *ñ* and *m*. The *m* ending is also a common exception to this rule in many other languages of Africa. This general phenomenon of vowel ending explains the intrusive vowel ending noticed in many Africans when they speak Indo-European languages (especially English and German) that have more of consonant than vowel endings. Igbo language words hardly begin with consonants except with such nasal consonants as *n* (as in *ndù*, *nti*, *nku*, etc.), *m* (as in *mmadu*, *mbem*, *mbò*, etc.). The fact that these nasals are never followed by vowels shows that at the beginning of a word, they serve really as vowels, e.g., *n* followed by the consonant *d* and then by a vowel *ù*: *ndù*. The exception to this rule of a word beginning in a vowel or a nasal is the imperative. All the second person (singular and plural) imperatives begin with consonants: *Pua!* (Go out!), *Bia!* (Come!), *Rie!* (Eat!),

Gbasaa nu (disperse). Two Igbo nouns begin with consonants: *Chi* (personal god) and *Di* (husband). These words can be prefixed to form many other nouns or compound nouns: *Chukwu* or *Chineke* (God), *di-ochi* (wine taper), *di-nta* (hunter). In Igbo, the common word structures are as follows:

V: vowel only, e.g., O (he/she/it).

VCV: vowel + consonant + vowel, e.g., *òké* (rat).

VCVCV: vowel + consonant + vowel + consonant + vowel, e.g., *òkúkò* (fowl).

NCV: nasal + consonant + vowel, e.g. *ntú* (nail).

The combination of these as in *ogologo* VCVCVCV (tall, long), *ntinti* NCVNCV (little), etc.

Lexical Contents

Each language has a set of vocabularies different from every other language. There are some cases of some few words which are identical in two or few languages. Where such identical vocabularies occur, their pronunciations (their phonologies) generally vary from one language to the other. The universal character of language is only on the cognitive and epistemological sense that each language serves as a means by which those who speak it are informed and by means of which they inform their co-speakers.

Philosophical Reflection on the Universal Language

The failure of all the attempts to bring all to speak one language has some deep philosophical implications about the nature of language itself. The fact is that language has both genetic and environmental aspects, and neither of these two aspects is to be neglected or de-emphasized. The language faculty, which is universal and which is genetic, will always actualize itself within a given social language community with all its cultural elements. This is the very reason why even the invented universal language, as soon as it finds itself among different peoples, splits into different languages as is the case with *Volapük*. As long as any language is meant to be the language of people in their normal life's interactions, that language inevitably follows the dynamism of human life with

all its diversities and possibilities. Language is a form of life.¹⁴ Nature is one, but it abhors uniformity.

The oneness of nature is in the form of unity. Unity implies plurality. There is unity only where there are diversities. The importance of unity is that in it, all the diverse qualities of the many are organized into one. Unity respects every individual member the way he/she is and tries to allow him/her to contribute what he/she has to the full actualization of the union. The beauty of nature consists in its varieties. What we are to aim at is not the uniformization of the language of the world in the so-dreamed universal language. It is, rather, the unification of all the wealth of the diverse languages of the world. Plurality is ever a value, though disintegration is never. For the better understanding of the world, we need the Anglo-Saxon philosophy cum English language with its quest for scientific precision, the French language cum philosophy with its humane character and its deep search into the human nature and human relation, the German language cum philosophy with its metaphysical speculations and idealistic system buildings; we need the Indian language cum philosophy with its religious transcendental approach. What of African languages (Swahili, Ashanti, Yoruba, Hausa, Kinyarwanda, or Igbo, etc.) cum philosophy? Of course, this also has something to offer to the better understanding of the world. A better and richer knowledge of the world would be attained through these diverse philosophies, or rather, philosophical approaches. The world Art serves as an illustration of my point here. Art, like philosophy (though each in its own way and level), has to do with people's culture, the reflections and imaginations about man and his world. A person can imagine how impoverished the world Art would have been were all to be just African Art, or just European Art. The wealth of the world Art is seen when all Arts of the diverse world cultures are brought

¹⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit., §§ 197-206, 241. For Wittgenstein, the language a person speaks is the language in which he thinks. He, therefore, rejects the idea of a French politician who "once said that it was a special characteristic of the French language that in French sentences words occurred in the sequence in which one thinks them." The German, for example, does not finish thinking before speaking, for he thinks according to the structure of German language. Confer L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, op. cit., no. 107.

together. Unity in diversity: that is the true nature of the world. All the diversities are but part of the whole.

I now come back to artificial formal and universal language believed by some to be most adequate for thinking: a language which never betrays thought (*"un langage...qui ne trahisse point la pensée"*).¹⁵ Some people, like Bacon, Leibniz, Russell and many logicians, are of the opinion that the natural language beclouds the purity, the distinctness and the exactitude of the human thought. How true is it that natural languages are not suitable for clear and distinct thinking? Is it true that artificial formal language is better in this vein? To what extent can a person think in artificial formal language?

The major feature of the natural languages (*Umgangssprache*) is that in them, a word has no fixed meaning. The meaning must be determined within a given universe of discourse (Pascal Blaise) or within a given language-game (Wittgenstein). The formal logicians and all those who quest for a language other than our natural human languages want a language where the meaning of each "word" (or rather, each sign) is both fixed and unique. Behind this thought is the platonic view that there is a given and fixed object that a word names or necessarily refers to in all circumstances. As a consequence, there is a truth condition for every proposition: a condition which determines the truth value of a proposition in all the circumstances. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is, to a great extent, an attack on the theory of the truth condition.¹⁶ Quine also casts doubt on this view when he defends the impossibility of radical

¹⁵ J-L. Poirier, "Nous parlons déjà la langue universelle," *Critique* 35 (1979), p. 652.

¹⁶ On Wittgenstein's rejection of the theory of the truth condition, confer S. A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp.72-78. According to Kripke, "Wittgenstein replaces the question, 'What must be the case for this sentence to be true?' with two others: first, 'Under what conditions may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied)?'; second, given an answer to the first question, 'What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of assertion (or denying) the form of words under these conditions?' (p. 73). This means that Wittgenstein replaces truth conditions by justification conditions (p. 77).

translations.¹⁷ The nature of the human language also proves the truth condition view wrong.

How correct are the inventors of the artificial language in trying to fix meanings contrary to the flexible and dynamic nature of the human language? A science is true when its aim is to master and harness nature, but not to distort and change nature. Is the human understanding, by its nature, fixed? The fact that the human language leaves the meaning of words flexible and dynamic allows the flexibility and the dynamism of the human understanding and endows the human understanding with a sort of infinite possibility. Poirier is, therefore, correct in calling attention to the very nature of human understanding in any quest to construct a language whose “words” have fixed meanings.¹⁸ The human mind is dynamic, not fixed, and has non-limited possibilities in its speculation. This same dynamism characterizes the human language which is a basic faculty of the human mind. Any attempt to fix the meanings of words is indirectly an attempt to limit and fix the extent to which the human mind can go in its inquiry. The language of the human thought is often the natural language in which man undergoes his experiences, poses questions about nature and tries answers to the questions posed.

Artificial language, especially the language of formal logic, rather than enabling the advancement of the human thinking, tries to tie it down. The formal logic, as it were, immobilizes the human mind and cages it within some few invented drawings (call them logical signs). The logical signs can be good in stating the results of reflections and ponderings already done, but they cannot be the means of such reflections and ponderings. A philosopher cannot speculate on the nature of reality by means of logical signs, but he can translate his thought into such signs for certain reasons. But the

¹⁷ W.V.O. Quine, “Translation and meaning,” in *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

¹⁸ J-L. Poirier writes: “Il faudrait se demander si ce n’est pas pour une raison essentielle que les significations ne se laissent point ainsi fixer, et cette recherche pourrait, en retour, instruire l’entendement sur lui-même et sur les conditions de sa lucidité: qui donc fixe les significations? L’entendement? ou ce dernier doit-il ou contraire mesurer l’étendue de sa dépossession en les regardant se fixer, hors de son régime, dans un langage qui n’est pas le sien et qui ne le sera jamais...” op. cit., p. 652.

logical signs are always in need of the natural language in order to be understood. Logical signs, like all invented signs, are secondary signs, while natural languages are primary signs. The secondary signs are understood in the primary signs. For instance, on seeing the following signs, an Englishman understands them in the words in brackets: \neg (negation), \pm (more or less), \wedge (and), \vee (or). On seeing the following international signs, the same Englishman interprets them as follows:

(Illustration 5)

| | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  No smoking |  Arrival |  Departure |
|  Reserved for those with handicaps |  Phone | <i>i</i> Information |

This illustrates the point I am making, that secondary signs are understood in a natural language. Each person who understands any of the above signs does so in the language in which he/she speaks and thinks. If natural language is twice removed from reality in the sense that it is the representation of reality, artificial language is three times removed from reality in the sense that it is representation of the representation. Poirier would even say that artificial language (which, for him, is nothing but drawings) is a thousand times less perfect for proper thinking than the natural language. He wonders why one should draw when one can talk.¹⁹ In mathematical and logical signs, the human mind is restricted to calculation, which is

¹⁹ "Pourquoi dessiner alors qu'on sait parler? Par quelle méprise peut-on croire en dire plus par un dessin que par un discours?" *Ibid.*, p. 657.

only one form of thinking. Man cannot speculate philosophically in such a language, says Poirier.²⁰

It may be an exaggeration on the part of Poirier to question the use of formal language *in toto*. Formal language has its own use, at least in calculation and in computer devices. In calculation, artificial signs reduce for the human mind the load of sorting out words and their relations to one another. For instance, it is easier for the mind to articulate and resolve the following arithmetical problem: $(235600 - 214890)^{3/4} - (4957 + 2865)^{1/4} = ?$ than when stated in words: What is the difference between three quarters of the difference between two hundred and thirty-five thousand six hundred and two hundred and fourteen thousand eight hundred and ninety, and the one quarter of the sum of four thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven and two thousand eight hundred and sixty-five? But then he (Poirier) is correct in saying that the home of the human thought is the natural language, and that to invent any artificial language that would replace the natural language is to paralyze the human thought which is itself formed and nourished in the natural language.²¹ Any attempt to invent an artificial language in order to suppress natural languages amounts to a quest for uniformity rather than for unity in diversity. It is in the language a person speaks that his/her mind is best cultivated, and it is in this same language that he/she best shares with others the riches of his/her mental reflections and speculations.

Conclusion

Intercultural philosophy proposes unity in diversity and is against uniformity; while the former enriches, the latter impoverishes. Variety, we say, is the spice of life. The very nature of the universe is that of unity in diversity, and nature seems to abhor uniformity. We saw above all the efforts made by some great thinkers to invent a universal language so as to uniformize the means of communication all over the world. However, as each of the so-called universal languages migrated from one place to the other, it varied from the original, gradually assumed the diversities of diverse peoples and cultures, thus proving that nature abhors uniformity.

²⁰ "Une langue artificielle n'est pas la langue dans laquelle peut se dire la spéculation philosophique, un tel langage n'est d'aucun secours pour un entendement qui veut s'accomplir et vivre effectivement." *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 659.

Nature guards its richness by preserving its diversity: diversity in cultures, races, languages, sexes, beliefs, opinions, et cetera. The same varieties are observed in the colors of flowers, the undulating nature of the surface of the earth, different species of animals, and so on. These varieties make the universe rich and beautiful to behold. To strip the universe of such varieties is really to render it poor, ugly, uninterested and disgusting.

Our analysis above of the differences of various languages from such points of view as syntax, formation of plurals, possessives, gender, conjugations, phonetic and lexical contents, shows how different languages of the world can complement one another in our quest to understand and discuss our world better. It becomes, therefore, our task to help in the growth and standardization of all the languages of the world, especially African languages, instead of allowing them go into extinction. This paper argues, in the light of intercultural philosophy, that each culture will contribute more to the wealth of world philosophy if it brings forward its own philosophy in its own language, which is the essential element of the culture.

Our emphasis on the differences between natural language does not, however, deny some universal characteristics of all languages. The fact of differences does not deny the fact or resemblance, a fact that is testified to by the universality of the language phenomenon. The fact that Heidegger, for example, was able to dialogue with the Japanese underscores the point that there is the possibility of dialogue between the German language and culture and the Japanese language and culture. Thus, there are some common elements in the two languages and cultures, their differences notwithstanding. Therefore, the Japanese tells Heidegger, "And while I was translating... at moments a radiance shone on me which let me sense that *the wellspring of reality from which those two fundamentally different languages arise was the same.*"²² These common elements in all the languages make for unity among the diverse languages of the world. They make translations from one language to another possible. The idea of and the efforts for one universal world language have been proved wrong and unrealistic by reality

²² M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 24 (emphases mine).

itself, for reality abhors uniformity. Rather than a universal language, translation remains the effective means of communication between different languages and cultures of the world. The possibility of translation confirms and makes manifest the unity among the diverse languages of the world.

Reflections on Intercultural Philosophy: Avoiding the Extremes

EDWARD J. ALAM

I recently finished co-supervising a doctoral dissertation from the University of Madras in South India on the theme of the importance of intercultural philosophy and whereas I am generally sympathetic with the growing interest in intercultural or world philosophy, it occurs to me that philosophers, whether in India, Africa, or wherever they might be, ought to stay clear of two extremes if they are engaged in this all important development. One extreme is to so emphasize the unique particularity of philosophical expression, approach and insight in various past and present cultures around the world, that one loses sight of any possible unity. The other is to so emphasize unity (and a corresponding monolithic monopoly of this unity) as to dismiss the important and complementary differences that are so enriching and necessary in the quest for wisdom. Of course, part of this tension concerns the broader or deeper tension between the universal and the particular, which, as we know, is an ancient one; it is at the very heart of Western philosophy in fact beginning with the Pre-Socratics, reaching a high point in the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and reverberating down through the Middle Ages into modernity and late modernity. The problem is a difficult one because it not only concerns trying to resolve a tension between what is common or universal and what is particular or singular, but involves asking about the very nature of universals and whether they really exist or whether they are mere names, or concepts or ideas with no corresponding reality. In other words, the problem is the perennial metaphysical quandary associated with the various schools of realism, nominalism, idealism, and conceptualism. And even in the modern period, when most modern philosophers were trying to ignore the age-old problem of universals, as they had concluded that it was an irrelevant pseudo problem of the past, it surprisingly emerged once again in late modernity, and in the most unlikely of places, the philosophy of mathematics. Given the modern obsession

with mathematics, the very backbone of that myopic epistemology that produced modern *scientism*, this certainly got the attention of the philosophers, most of whom had begun to use the perceived solidity of the natural sciences as the benchmark of what constituted *real* knowledge.¹ At any rate, one philosopher responsible for raising this new awareness of an age-old problem was Willard Quine, when he asked about the *nature* of mathematics, and pointed out, in answer to his own question, that logicism corresponded to realism, formalism to nominalism, and intuitionism to conceptualism. In the words of Quine himself: "Classical mathematics...up to its neck in commitments to an ontology of abstract entities. Thus it is that the great mediaeval controversy over universals has flared up anew in the modern philosophy of mathematics."²

By referring to this controversy as a *great* controversy, Quine rightly indicated that, like all the great controversies in philosophy, they never really go completely away. And so it is with the problems of universals, which, as I have indicated, is an important part of the debate regarding intercultural or world philosophy. More specifically, the question concerning whether the universal term *human* is a mere name or a concept or whether it corresponds to something in reality, seems particularly relevant for the discussion of intercultural philosophy, since when we use the term *culture* we generally and primarily mean *human* culture. But is there really any such thing as human culture? Or is it better to simply speak about human cultures? And if we use the plural noun rather than the singular, in which way does this change the meaning of the adjective? Or does it? Or perhaps we should not speak about human culture, but only African culture or Asian culture for instance? But even here, is it meaningful and accurate to speak about African culture, as if it were monolithic? Should we not speak about Ethiopian culture or Ugandan or Nigerian culture and so on? And here again, should we just speak about Ethiopian culture, or must we speak about Semitic as distinct from Hemitic Ethiopian culture, and can we simply speak about Ethiopian culture, or any culture for that

¹ Perhaps even the great Immanuel Kant fell into the trap of using the natural sciences as a benchmark for what constituted real knowledge, so enamoured was he with the achievements of Isaac Newton.

² Quoted by Ed L. Miller in his *Questions that Matter* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 71.

matter, as if it is the same thing today that it was a century or a millennia ago? This of course goes on and on until we finally reach the individual person, who in his or her own totality, gives the ultimate meaning to the word culture, which is one of the reasons why John Paul II liked to say that “there is really only one culture, the culture of man.” But with this we are back to a universal. The present challenge at the heart of intercultural philosophy, I suggest, is to really see that the entire human race is a single family, and then to articulate this metaphysically so that the identities of persons, peoples, and cultures are not submerged in some kind of inhumane totalitarianism. At any rate, this is only one side of the problem when we are speaking about intercultural or world philosophy; the other part of the problem is the word *philosophy* itself, as there are those prominent philosophers from say the British or American analytic school of philosophy, as we all know, who would argue that mental activity is not philosophical unless a particular kind of logic is critically employed in a specific kind of argumentation, as the famous Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu often pointed out.³ I shall return momentarily to the well-known debate regarding whether it is “argumentation” or “reflection” that best captures the essence of philosophy, as this dispute is particularly important for the debate regarding the existence of African philosophy, which in turn is so relevant to the whole discussion of intercultural philosophy; but my intention now is just to point out some of the problems associated with the expression intercultural philosophy.

In spite of these and other problems associated with the very concept, I suggest that clarifying it is well worth the effort since it seems to represent a move towards a kind of world philosophy wherein the attitude is one of complementarity rather than competition. This seems to be one of the most important issues during these days of modern globalization, for when the latter attitude is over-emphasized it inevitably to lead to destructive conflict. To be sure, competition and conflict are inevitable elements of human existence, and certain things are certainly worth competing and even fighting for, things like beauty, and the good, and truth, but the problem is that things as profoundly transcendent and

³ See Wiredu's *Philosophy and an African Culture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 47.

mysteriously imminent and rich as these, what in classical Western philosophy of course were called the *transcendentals of being*, cannot be the sole possession of an individual person, nation, or culture, but at the same time, we can't really speak about them either without reference to persons, nations, or cultures. This is one reason why I come down squarely on the side of the realists in the debate over the nature of universals, and claim that universals really exist and are not mere names or concepts or ideas in the individual minds of individual human beings, and thereby differing accordingly.

If the good the true and the beautiful do not have real universal existence – worth searching for and conforming to, then the entire philosophical enterprise seems to me to be absurd. But in claiming that these universals have real existence, I would not advocate what is usually called the extreme realism of the Platonists, and allow for their existence apart from the particular. I think rather that a moderate form of realism is much closer to how things really are; furthermore, while reflecting on something as important and profound as the transcendentals of beings, moderate realism guards against the error of assuming that any one individual, culture, race, or nation has a monopoly on the truth, or the good, or the beautiful. For if these universals exist in the particulars themselves, then none of the particulars can be excluded; all of the singular expressions of the good together embody the good itself, and the same could be said for the true and the beautiful. This “embodying,” however, should not be understood *quantitatively*, as so many parts of a puzzle that add up to the good, but *qualitatively*, as so many elements of a mystery, that unfolds slowly in the mystery of time. And this is particularly the case when we bring the universal term, the *human*, into the question, which then compels us to say that, yes, all of the particular expressions of the good (or the true or beautiful) together embody the good itself, except those things that by nature have the ability to reject their nature, and move towards non-being.

If we admit that the universal *human* really exists in that there is such a thing as human nature, and that an essential component of this nature is to participate in its own perfection, then we can also speak about the need for responsible action, which is nothing but the ability to participate, more and more, as it were, in more and more being. Such participation first requires seeing and receiving the radical giftedness of being as the whole sacred order, which gives

meaning to the parts, with beauty emerging at the intersection of the good and the true, and thereby revealing the whole. What is then required is a response – a responsible response that achieves just the right *relation* with everything and especially everyone according to the reality of this sacred order. Again, if we do not admit as much, I don't see how any of the traditional branches of philosophy could have any meaning whatsoever. Neither Ethics, nor Aesthetics, nor, of course, Metaphysics would be able to avoid falling into complete absurdity, which would then leave only epistemology and logic as the defining activities of philosophy. It is here, I suggest, that intercultural philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular can play a valuable and indeed crucial role in the enrichment of what I like to call, following Etienne Gilson, the unity of philosophical experience.

This enrichment includes, very simply, restoring philosophy to what in its essence it has always been: a loving search for wisdom. It is good to remember that many philosophers in ancient and even medieval times, in the East and in the West, were also considered healers, as the loving search for wisdom was embarked upon in order to share wisdom with those who wanted healing guidance in terms of how to live a good and happy life. In Africa, most of us are aware of what the great Kenyan thinker, H. Odera Orika, liked to refer to as “Sage philosophy,” by which he meant “the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community... [whose] way[s] of thinking and explaining the world fluctuates between *popular wisdom* [consisting] of (well-known communal maxims, aphorisms, and general common sense truths) and *didactic wisdom* [that is] (an expounded wisdom and a rational thought of some given individuals within a community).”⁴ It is important to stress the latter part of this definition, which emphasizes rational thought, in order to avoid the conclusion that “sage philosophy” (whether it is African, Indian, or Asian) is characterized by either a lack of, or total absence of, logical, rational systematic, critical thinking. Kwasi Wiredu makes the important point, in fact, in a seminal paper titled “Formulating Modern Thought in African Languages: Some Theoretical Considerations” that logic is simply

⁴ See H. Odera Orika's *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Nairobi: African Centre for Technology Studies, 1991), 33.

“the science of consistency”⁵ and that because all languages share a common logic, demonstrated by the relative success of translation, it would be absurd to say that logic is the sole possession of a certain culture or people. His work on how his own Akan people use and obey the law of non-contradiction is still worth looking at in this regard. One of my purposes, at any rate, in having recourse to African philosophy, and especially to “sage philosophy” should be obvious by now. I want to suggest that it provides a necessary corrective to the reductionist trends in philosophy that want to define the very essence of philosophy in terms of logical argumentation alone. Sage philosophy uses logic and rational and critical discourse, but it does not make the mistake of confusing the tools of argumentation with the very purpose of philosophy, namely, growth in wisdom.

Neither were things all that different in the great medieval universities in the West, at least, as far as the ultimate aim of philosophy, was concerned. These academic institutions still had a profoundly integrated curriculum wherein philosophers were also natural scientists and theologians. In these institutions, philosophy was right at the center of assisting that Queen of all the sciences, theology, which provided a solid unity in the curriculum, and which in turn shed effective light on how societies functioned. I am not claiming that the modern development of philosophy into a highly technical, primarily closed academic exercise for specialized experts is completely futile, nor that we should or could return to ancient or medieval models, wherein philosophy was more relevant to everyday life for many people because of its close proximity to theology, natural science, and politics, but simply to suggest that if philosophy is going to make a difference, it has to be engaged in a loving desire for wisdom, whereby the search for the good, the true, and the beautiful is central. Again, philosophy should not be mistaken for its tools of logical argumentation and critical thinking, but should begin and end in wonder and reflection. This of course is not to ignore the important developments in logic and critical thinking, some of which, as we know, have led to remarkable computational achievements that have revolutionized technology and natural science, for instance with the discovery of algorithms,

⁵ Quoted by Oruka, *Ibid.*, 27

but to insist again on the search for the whole, for wisdom, as the beginning and end of philosophy.

Professor George McLean likes to tell the story of how, in the late 1960's the astronomers and philosophers differed in their reactions to the grand news that man had landed on the moon. The astronomers, he notes, were so enthused about the new knowledge this would give them of the moon itself, while the philosophers, at least the ones who had not reduced philosophy to mere argumentation, or fallen into the emptiness of nominalism, were excited rather about what this new knowledge would mean for humanity, as this was the first time ever that human beings were able to witness the earth as a globe. This was the first time that the whole world was seen from above, and the accounts of those who saw it are still worth pondering. Neil Armstrong wrote about his experience, as did some of the others; the overwhelming insight as McLean formulates it is that "it is no longer the parts which give sense to the whole, but the converse: the global is the basis of the meaning of its participants."⁶

It is this insight that philosophers who engage in intercultural philosophy need to grasp ever more deeply if the opportunities and challenges that globalization now presents to us are to be realized. As humanity seems to be more interactive now than at any other time in the past, and as this trend seems to be growing, the challenge is to transform the "shared sense of being close to one another...into true communion."⁷ Such transformation is the responsibility of everyone, but the philosopher, by re-evaluating the category of *relation*, has a crucial and foundational role to play in this work of transformation. In the words of *Caritas in veritate*, with which I would now like to close, the Holy Father writes, "...new trajectory of thinking is needed in order to arrive at a better understanding of the implications of our being one family; interaction among the peoples of the world calls us to embark upon this new trajectory, so that integration can signify solidarity...rather than marginalization.

⁶ George F. McLean, "Globalization as Diversity in Unity," in *Social Reconstruction in Africa: Ugandan Philosophical Studies II*, edited by E. Wamala, A.R. Byaruhanga, A.T. Dalfovo, J.K. Kigongo, S.A. Mwanahewa and G. Tusabe (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1999), p. 120.

⁷ *Caritas in Veritate*, 53

Thinking of this kind requires a *deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation*. This is a task that cannot be undertaken by the social sciences alone, insofar as the contribution of disciplines such as metaphysics and theology is needed if man's transcendent dignity is to be properly understood."⁸

⁸ *Ibid.*

Part V
**On the Possibilities of Intercultural
Communication**

Migrating Texts and Traditions in Intercultural Philosophy¹

WILLIAM SWEET

Recently, there has been much discussion of the relation of philosophy and culture and, particularly, of the bearing of culture on philosophy. For example, one finds today the thesis that philosophies emerge from their cultures, and can never stand independently of them. This thesis is, of course, by no means uncontroversial and it is not universally accepted, but it is nevertheless widely held.

If this thesis is true, however, it raises a question – and that is about philosophy ‘across’ cultures. If philosophical traditions cannot be separated from the cultures in which they originate, can there be an ‘intercultural’ or ‘comparative’ philosophy?

By ‘intercultural’ or ‘comparative’ philosophy, I do not mean to refer to a particular content or approach to philosophy, but simply the explicit activity of drawing on or engaging philosophies originating from outside one’s culture or traditions, in the process of carrying out one’s own philosophical work. It is not so much – as Paul Masson-Oursel writes, concerning what he called “la philosophie comparée” – “the general examination of the ways in which human beings of all races and cultures reflect upon their actions and act upon their reflections.”² “It is perhaps closer to what British and Indian philosophers in the early and mid 20th century, such as Alban Widgery, P.T. Raju, and – most famously – Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, described as the view that there is “a common platform” from which philosophical reflection is to begin – for

¹ Since its presentation in 2010, a version of this paper has been published (as “Intercultural Philosophy and the Phenomenon of Migrating Texts and Traditions”) in *Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy*, ed. Hans Lenk (Berlin: LIT Verlag), pp. 39-58. I have also drawn on this paper extensively in *What is Intercultural Philosophy?*, ed. William Sweet (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014), pp. 161-171.

² Paul Masson-Oursel, “True Philosophy is Comparative Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1951), pp. 6-9, at p. 6.

example, certain common interests and aspirations of humanity – and the search for some transcultural “integrative approach” or “integrated” outlook.³ In what follows, I discuss a matter related to that I take to be central to the possibility of intercultural and comparative philosophy – and this is what I call the phenomenon of ‘migrating texts and traditions.’⁴

This claim of ‘migration’ of texts or traditions from one culture to another, is not a uniquely philosophical one; indeed, we have comparative literature, cross-cultural or comparative religion, and intercultural or global ethics, in which it seems that we are dealing with the same or similar phenomena. But our understanding of this phenomenon for philosophy is important. For if there is no genuine migration, then the project of an intercultural or comparative philosophy or of ‘engaging’ philosophies outside of one’s own – or even communication among philosophical traditions – seems to be undermined.

What I propose to do here is to start by outlining some putative instances of migrating texts and traditions, and then identify a number of challenges to this phenomenon. To respond to these challenges, I briefly consider additional examples of ‘migration,’ and make some inferences about what they indicate about the general claim. This will, I believe, allow us to address the challenges, to see something of when and why texts and traditions migrate – and when and why they do not – but also to draw some implications for intercultural philosophy.

‘Migrating’ Texts and Traditions

The Phenomenon

It is obvious – indeed, undeniable – that philosophical texts and traditions from one culture have been found in very different cultures and intellectual milieus.

For example, consider the presence of (Indian) Buddhist philosophy in China, Korea, and Japan – and more recently in North America and Europe. Thus, from an ‘original’ Buddhism in India, we

³ P.T. Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banardidass, 1992), pp. 295; 300.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of issues, examples, and implications here, see William Sweet, ed., *Migrating Texts and Traditions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012).

not only have the development of 'schools' (the two major schools being Mahayana and Theravada), but a 'migration' – a spread of this Buddhism throughout Asia, and a number of further developments (within Mahayana), such as Tibetan and East Asian (including Pure Land and Chan/ Zen) in Japan and China, and Seon in Korea.

Many philosophies originating in the West seem similarly to have 'migrated' east and south – they have been introduced and, it would seem, have been integrated and appropriated, into non-western cultures and traditions (e.g., in Africa, in the Indian sub-continent, and in China and Japan). As examples here we can think of the introduction of British philosophy (e.g., empiricism, utilitarianism, but also idealism) into India in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the introduction of hermeneutics and post modern thought into Asia. Thus, we are not surprised to find the use and the translation of texts by H.-G. Gadamer and others (e.g., J. Derrida, G. Deleuze, and M. Foucault) into various Asian languages, particularly Chinese.

Yet another example of this phenomenon – and it is by far from a recent one – is the work of the great 'orientalists' and Indologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Max Müller (1823-1900). Müller's translations and editions of the major texts of the great Asian religious traditions, in the 50 volume "Sacred Books of the East" (published by Oxford University Press, 1879-1910), provided an introduction and access to the 'East' for a large number of western scholars, and contributed not only to philology, but also to the development of philosophy, religious studies, and the like.

Finally, of course, one finds philosophies and philosophical texts from one part of the West (e.g., the United States) being introduced into another part of the West (e.g., Russia or France). Here, we might think of texts of political philosophy, such as that of John Rawls, being introduced into France and translated into French – or, conversely, texts of French philosophy, such as those of Jacques Derrida, being found in the Anglo-American world, and translated into English.

Explanation

The preceding examples not only illustrate that there has been a migration of philosophical texts and traditions, but suggest that most – if not all – philosophical texts can, in principle, migrate. The

explanations for the occasion of such a migration are, however, varied.

a. Why this ‘migration’ occurs sometimes admits of a simple historical or sociological explanation. Indirectly or semi intentionally, through war and colonialization, through religion and evangelization, through general cultural contact (e.g., travel, media [particularly, the internet], higher education, and art), and through commercial relations and globalization, and so on, one sees the transmission of (philosophical) texts and traditions from one culture into another.

For example, classical Greek philosophical texts translated into Syriac (in the 6th century) and into Arabic (in the 9th and early 10th centuries), followed, respectively, the close of the School of Athens in 529, and the interests of the Caliph al-Ma’mun (786-833) in the accumulation of not only medical but scientific texts of all kinds. Colonialism by Britain and France, in the 18th and 19th centuries, led to the establishment of European-model educational institutions in Africa, Asia (especially India), and Canada. Not only were the organization and curriculum European, but the texts for the courses were largely European as well. Thus British and French philosophy came to be read and studied at some distance from their ‘home.’⁵

Of course, the principal aim of colonisation, trade, missionary work, and the like was not the transmission of philosophies – but it is not implausible that some leaders would have seen philosophy as providing an intellectual justification and support for colonial, economic, or missionary activity.

b. There are, however, other explanations for the introduction of philosophical texts and traditions into different cultures – i.e., cases where such an introduction was deliberate.

One case is that where those within a culture or tradition believe the philosophical work from another answers or addresses their questions in some way. Here, we might think of the influence of

⁵ There are, of course, many different ways in which texts came to be present. For instance, the phenomenon of the international offices of major European presses – such as the Oxford University Press, which had offices in close to a dozen countries, from Hong Kong and Karachi to Cape Town, London, and Toronto – promoted European texts around the world. Texts also were introduced when scholars, going to or returning from overseas, simply happened upon new academic work.

western philosophy, broadly construed, in Japan starting during the late Meiji period and continuing into the early 20th century. Part of the Meiji ideology was to pursue a policy of modernization in order to strengthen Imperial rule and provide a means of limiting further intervention from western countries. This included not only understanding and drawing on the science, technology, and military prowess of the West, but understanding western philosophies and, as appropriate, drawing on them in developing Japanese thought. Some scholars, such as Nakajima Rikizo (中島力造; 1858-1918), left Japan to study in the West – Rikizo attended Yale University, receiving a PhD on Kant in 1889.⁶ With his return to Japan, we find not only the emergence of ethics as an academic discipline in country, but the introduction of European philosophical idealism.⁷ Rikizo was, of course, just one – though one of the first – of the wave of Japanese thinkers at the turn of the 20th century who attempted to engage and draw from German, British, and American philosophy.⁸ And we find, in some of the early writings of another of the major philosophers of modern Japan, Nishida Kitarô (西田幾多郎; 1870-1945), an interest in introducing certain key texts and traditions of the west – such as those of the British idealist, T.H. Green – and in using Green’s philosophy as a means of reinforcing the Japanese ideal of dedication to the collectivity.⁹ In these and many other such

⁶ Rikizô Nakajima, *Kant's doctrine of the "thing-in-itself"* (New Haven, CT: Price, Lee & Adkins, 1889).

⁷ See Rikizô Nakajima, *Saikin rinri gakusetsu no kenkyû*, [Recent research in ethical theory] (Tôkyô: Iwanami Shoten, 1919). Taishô 8 [1919]. See also his *Gurin-shi rinri gakusetsu* [The ethical theory of T.H. Green] (Dôbunkan, 1909).

⁸ For a lengthy discussion of Rikizo see Richard Reitan, "The Emergence of Ethics as an Academic Discipline in 1880s Japan," paper delivered at the 4th Asian Studies Conference (2000); Sophia University (Ichigaya Campus), Japan, June 24-25, 2000.

⁹ On the place of Green in Japanese philosophy, see David Dilworth, "The range of Nishida's early religious thought: Zen no kenkyuu," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 19 (1969), 409-421; Atsuko Hirai, 'Self-realisation and Common Good: T.H. Green in Meiji Ethical Thought', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 5 (1979), 107-36; Atsuko Hirai, "Thomas Hill Green in Modern East Asia, with special reference to the thought of Mao Tse-tung," in *El Colegio de Mexico, 30th International Congress of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa [1976]*, vol. 4 *China*, ed. Graciela de la Lama (1982), 145-63; Atsuko Hirai, "Anglo-American Influences on Nishida Kitaro," in *Japan and the World: Essays on Japanese History and Politics in Honour of Ishida Takeshi*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein and Haruhiro Fukui

cases, we see an effort to reach out to another philosophical tradition in order to answer one's own problems.¹⁰

Conversely, an introduction or migration of a tradition or text may occur because a person believes it to answer or address *someone else's* questions – i.e., one brings one's texts and traditions into another culture in order to tell others one's 'truth.'

As an example of one 'seeking to tell others one's truth,' consider the work of John McKenzie (1883–1955), Professor of Philosophy – and, later Principal – at Wilson College, Bombay (India) from 1908 to 1944. In his *Hindu ethics: a historical and critical essay* (1922), McKenzie provided a survey of the Hindu traditions from the Rg Veda to modern Hindu thought (e.g., Ram Mohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda). McKenzie concluded with a comparison of Hindu and Christian ethics, arguing that while there is a positive contribution of Hinduism to ethical thought, Hinduism falls short. Christianity, then, was offered as a model that could provide a more satisfactory basis for an ethic and a stronger conception of duty.¹¹ Indeed, such an approach was typical

(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 20-41, 258-9; Yukiyasu Shigeru, "The Backgrounds of the Birth of Green's Prolegomena to Ethics," in *The Bulletin of the Okayama College of Science* [Okayama University of Science], Vol. 6 (1970), 13-27. See also Bernard Stevens, "L'école de Kyôto comme expression emblématique du métissage de la pensée"

¹⁰ There are, of course, many similar examples. In Indian philosophy, one may think of Narendanath Dutta (Swami Vivekananda; 1863-1902) or Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833). Ram Mohan Roy is regarded as one of the most important figures in the Bengal Renaissance, and a founder in 1828 of the Brahma Sabha and of the Brahma Samaj movement. Roy was influenced, in part, by the work of the Baptist missionary, William Carey, and he worked closely with the British for a number of years (1803-1815). Roy was instrumental in introducing western learning into Indian education, as well as with social reform. In 1817, he was involved in the establishment of the Hindu College at Calcutta and, in 1830, of the General Assembly's Institution.

¹¹ McKenzie allowed that certain elements in Hinduism – e.g., dharma and stability; ties to others in community; that asceticism focuses on the spiritual over the material; the existence of passive virtues [ahimsa] – were noteworthy but, nevertheless insufficient for a comprehensive ethical view. McKenzie held that, in Hinduism, "the system of dharma rests on no sure intellectual supports." *Hindu Ethics* (London: H Milford/Oxford University Press), p. 241.

of a number of early analyses of Hinduism by British 'missionary-philosophers' in India.¹²

A third explanation for the introduction of such texts and traditions is much less confrontational: it may simply be because one wishes to engage in dialogue or conversation with others, or because one thinks that there are common or shared or universal questions or concerns, or just because one wishes to understand others (for political, economic, social purposes) – and so one seeks out what others have written.

As an instance of this, consider the 'comparative philosophy' of P.T. Raju. For Raju, there are three principal traditions that philosophers can draw on – that of China, of India, and of the West. Raju holds that, in Chinese thought, we find an autonomous, social ethics based in human nature; in Indian thought, the reality and autonomy of the inner spiritual life; and in Western thought, a view of life as rooted in physical nature. These traditions, Raju writes, are distinctive, yet complementary. The complementarity of each tradition provides, according to Raju, a means by which each can "widen its scope" – but he also suggests that "they can be brought together."¹³ Raju himself is not concerned to advocate for one approach or the other, and neither does he propose a superficial syncretism. But he clearly does seek to encourage the introduction and appropriation of ideas from other cultures.

Such examples – of texts and traditions which have their origins in one culture being found in other cultures and traditions – suggest a general thesis: that these texts and traditions not only migrate, but integrate and assimilate, that they can and do engage problems outside their culture of origin, contribute to their discussion – and perhaps more.

What are we to make of this phenomenon? Does it mean that philosophy 'crosses cultures'? that philosophy is independent of

¹² See, for example, A.G. Hogg, *Karma and Redemption* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1909) and W.S. Urquhart, *Pantheism and the Value of Life, with special reference to Indian philosophy* (London: Epworth Press, 1919). McKenzie's book was a work of scholarship, designed in part to bring western students out of their insularity, but also to show some that the western traditions could provide an account of ethics that addressed the perceived limitations of Hindu thought.

¹³ Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy*, p. 335.

culture? Does it show that there is a “common platform” of philosophical work that can serve as the basis for a comparative study, and that scholars from all cultures can contribute to producing an integrated philosophy that is genuinely intercultural?

Challenges

Given that there are many examples of such a ‘presence’ of ideas, texts, and the like, that have moved from one culture into another, the thesis of ‘migrating texts’ may seem not only straightforward, but rather prosaic. And it seems to reflect a point that many philosophers take for granted when they read and teach the classical or mediaeval – or even the modern – philosophers today: i.e., that philosophical texts and traditions are not restricted to their cultures of origin.

For some, however, this thesis is far from unproblematic and uncontroversial. They do not deny that there has been some kind of encounter of the texts, ideas, and traditions of one culture into others, but they challenge how far or how deep it goes – and they suggest that the ‘migration’ and appropriation are more apparent than real.

A first challenge to this thesis derives its force from a claim about philosophy and its relation to culture. A number of philosophers today argue that philosophies and philosophical traditions are deeply marked by the cultures in which they arise, and that this precludes not only any direct engagement, but any attempt at comparativism. Philosophy is embedded in culture. It is not just that it has its source in its culture of origin, but it can never break free of that source.

The reasons for this are fairly easy to surmise.

Our language and values are rooted in our culture, and it is within this context that we find the specific sorts of problems and questions that philosophers pursue. Indeed, it is from one’s culture that we learn what counts as philosophy (as distinct from literature, science, history, or religion), and how to distinguish philosophy from the religious, the scientific, the axiological, and the literary. One’s culture influences in what ‘language’ philosophical questions are expressed and answered – and even what counts as a satisfactory answer. It is because of this that, for some time in the west, the work of figures such as Laozi, Confucius, or Sankara, or the traditions of

thought in Asia or Africa or of American aboriginal tribes, were regarded by many as not being philosophy, but rather religion or 'social practices' or 'worldviews.'

As an illustration of this, some point to cases where one tradition or culture lacks the terminology, or concepts, or even the syntax to permit problems or concepts of other traditions to be intelligible – or where a language can 'tilt' a discussion in a way that makes the expression of philosophical issues from one culture awkward or irrelevant.¹⁴ This has been a concern of some African philosophers, particularly on matters related to ontology. For, if there are, as some African philosophers report, three or four constituent principles of human being, rather than the traditional two of western thought (i.e., mind or soul and body), then such issues as mind/body dualism, or the nature of death as the radical separation of soul and body, are not only not translatable, but arguably irrelevant to African thought.¹⁵

Second, the thesis of 'communication' across (philosophical) cultural traditions is challenged by an account of (the nature of) philosophy itself.

R.G. Collingwood writes of philosophy as involving a method of 'question and answer' – of "asking questions and answering them."¹⁶ Thus, in order to understand what exactly a philosopher said or meant, we need to know the question that she or he sought to answer.¹⁷ If this is so, then how a text from another context can

¹⁴ For more on this, see my "Culture and Pluralism in Philosophy," in William Sweet, ed., *Philosophy, Culture, and Pluralism* (Aylmer, QC: Editions du scribe, 2002), pp. v-xxi. It has been claimed that some philosophers may simply not understand the views of philosophers from other cultures (because their own philosophical views are so culturally-laden that they cannot recognise the propositions and conceptual structures of other cultures; or because they are so immersed in their own approach that they cannot recognize that they have an approach).

¹⁵ See, for example, Chibueze Udeani, "The Body-Mind-Spirit Relationship within the African World-View," in *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions*, Vol. 2 (2003), pp. 57-62.

¹⁶ Collingwood, *New Leviathan*, p. 74. (It is interesting that Hans-Georg Gadamer finds a link with Collingwood in Gadamer's own logic of question and answer, which he develops in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960; See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 1975, p. 333.).

¹⁷ Collingwood writes that "Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question" [Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford:

migrate and integrate into one's own is, at the very least, rather complicated. Prior to employing a text from another culture as possibly providing an answer to one's problems, we must, presumably, engage in a 'mini history of philosophy' in order to discern the question giving rise to that text in the first place. And if we do not or cannot know the questions that gave rise to that text, then whatever 'answers' we think we find may not be those of the text. Indeed, they may not be 'answers' at all. In such a case, the text is, at best, the occasion for a philosophical reflection, but there is no reason to believe that that text actually has any bearing on the question we are considering.¹⁸ While this challenge does not absolutely exclude migration, it does suggest that, in order to show the use of a particular philosophical text, we may first have to go through a lengthy, preliminary process – perhaps something like Collingwood's theory of re-enactment.¹⁹

Third, the thesis that texts and traditions migrate, and can be understood within and assimilated into other philosophical traditions, seems also to be challenged by a claim found in Alasdair

Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 23], and that "In order to find out [a philosopher's] meaning you must also know what the question was . . . to which the thing he [or she] has said or written was meant as an answer" (Collingwood, *Autobiography* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939], p. 31).

¹⁸ Another interesting implication of Collingwood's views, however, is that genuine disagreement may be less common than we might think for, "two propositions do not contradict each other unless they are answers to the same question." Collingwood, *Autobiography*, p. 33. Collingwood's method is, in a sense, backward looking (and hence reflects hermeneutics), but it is also forward looking, for it also provides a way of pursuing future enquiries on a topic. And this, together with the theory of re-enactment, provides a basis for a recognition of the role of history and culture, that is consistent with a rejection of relativism, subjectivism, and historicism.

For claims that Collingwood is adopting a form, of historicism, see Leo Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 5 (1952), 559-586; Louis O. Mink, "Collingwood's Historicism: A Dialectic of Process," and "Collingwood's Dialectic of History," in Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, ed. Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 223-45 and 246-85.

¹⁹ See, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 215; *Autobiography*, pp. 110-114. See also, for example, W. H. Dray, *History as Re-enactment: R. G. Collingwood's Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); H. Saari, *Re-enactment: A Study in R. G. Collingwood's Philosophy of History* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1984).

MacIntyre, concerning the nature and role of terms and concepts in relation to traditions.²⁰ MacIntyre notes, for example, that in our contemporary philosophical – and, particularly, ethical – vocabulary, we have terms and concepts coming from a range of texts and traditions, but without any particular coherence or consistency. Now, when people share a language, or live together, they may believe that they share a broader overall culture and tradition – and so they may think that they can understand one another quite well, and that there is no problem in communicating with each other and working together on philosophical problems. But, MacIntyre writes, this flies in the face of experience; for example, "...nothing is more striking in the contemporary university than the extent of the apparently ineliminable continuing divisions and conflicts within *all* humanistic enquiry."²¹

For MacIntyre, moral beliefs and practices are constituted or formed by the traditions in which they are found. Each tradition has "its own standards of rational justification...[and] its set of authoritative texts."²² With new texts and traditions – and the corresponding beliefs and epistemic and moral practices – we also may have new standards of reasonableness, or justification, or proof. And so, when "debate between fundamentally opposed standpoints does occur...it is inevitably inconclusive. Each warring position characteristically appears irrefutable to its own adherents; indeed in its own terms and by its own standards of argument it *is* in practice irrefutable. But each warring position equally seems to its opponents to be insufficiently warranted by rational argument."²³ Efforts at dialogue, on this model, will not get us very far.

This is not to say that there cannot be any communication across traditions – but MacIntyre would insist that it is much more challenging than many realise. Clearly, texts, traditions, and beliefs come into contact with, and – in some sense – cross into other

²⁰ Nothing in what follows hinges on whether MacIntyre himself would accept this reading, but a follower of MacIntyre may have to.

²¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990), p. 6.

²² Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 345.

²³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 7. MacIntyre provides a series of caveats, however, starting on p. 5.

traditions. But *fruitful* contact and integration are far from automatic and, when they do occur, this is the result of a good deal of discernment by a person of 'practical wisdom.' In many if not most cases, then, MacIntyre's argument suggests that 'migration' is problematic. We need, at the very least, to be conscious of the contextually embedded or tradition-based character of our beliefs – and of our conception of reason – and those of others. In philosophical discussion (which is often more abstract than most), there are many traditions, each with their 'final vocabularies', sometimes radically distinct, and there is an incommensurability among different traditions – and no formal way to go beyond the differences.

There are, furthermore, a number of related questions that bear on the issue of migration, and which seem to require consideration.

The first is simply how one is to define 'text' and 'tradition,' and whether we can ever separate the two. The old question returns: What constitutes a text? If those in the West are to read outside of their traditions, how much of those non-Western texts, and how many of them, stand on their own, and how much depends (as in certain Indian or Arabic texts) on ongoing exegetical work (i.e., so that we have what has been called a 'tradition text')? Some would say, then, that before we can say much about migration, we need to engage in careful reflection on what is meant by 'text' and 'tradition' – how one is to read or interpret a text – particularly when it is a challenge to distinguish description from metaphor or poetry; what it means to find an 'answer' or to learn from a text; and how traditions are established and transmitted, and what their relations are to cultures.

A second question concerns the nature of the communication or migration across traditions and cultures. What is the relation of philosophy to cultures and cultural traditions – and does experience actually show that philosophy can be a cross-cultural or intercultural practice? Are there rules or principles or guidelines that enable one to determine how texts and traditions are to be understood and used? What of the different ends or purposes of texts – about how the text is employed (e.g., to answer a problem; to propose a worldview; for its own sake; for entertainment or amusement)? Can texts be understood as something 'discrete' and *sui generis*, without requiring an understanding of tradition or history or historical

context? How does language and translation affect meaning and truth and, therefore, migration?

A third point – though this is far from the last that one can raise – is that the phenomenon of migration or integration or appropriation makes a number of epistemological assumptions. What is (cognitively) presupposed in the introduction and appropriation of an idea, text, or tradition? Are there common or sharable cognitive structures, criteria for meaning and truth, and standards of justification and truth? Are *traditions* commensurable – or can one hope for only the commensurability of individual statements? Is there (truth and) objectivity on such an account? Does the possibility of comparative fields of enquiry provide a foundation for intercultural philosophy, and would this entail the ‘comparability’ of claims or subjects lying outside of philosophy but affected by philosophical texts and traditions, such as religion or theology?

The preceding objections and concerns are clearly forceful. Nevertheless, it is also clear that something is taking place in the putative migration presented earlier – and so one needs to take a much closer look at the phenomenon and, as appropriate, address these concerns.

Responses

To see whether we can obtain more insight into this phenomenon of ‘migration’, what it presupposes and, thereby, how to respond to these challenges, let us turn to some additional examples.

Some Examples

Consider, for example, the communication of ‘Western’ philosophy to China in the 17th century by Jesuit philosophers such as Julius Aleni.²⁴ How did this occur? First, Aleni and others recognised the need to find ways to make Western philosophical ideas less ‘foreign’ to the Chinese. Their solution was to attempt to find suitable texts – and so they focussed on the work of Aristotle. Specifically, the approach they took was to begin by presenting

²⁴ See Vincent Shen, “The Migration of Aristotelian Philosophy to China in the 17th Century,” in William Sweet, ed., *Migrating Texts and Traditions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012).

Aristotle the person – telling the story of Aristotle (e.g., identifying him as a sage) – and then introducing elements of his philosophy that reflected Chinese interests. Aleni and others, thus, produced Chinese translations of certain of Aristotle’s works (or, to be more precise, summaries and introductions to them in Chinese) – for example, a version of the *De Anima* along with books related to it, into a text such as the *Xingxue Cushu*. By focussing on areas such as moral philosophy and ethical values, they were able to present Aristotle’s philosophy of nature and theory of soul (in such texts as the *De Anima*, *Meteorology*, and *De Generatione et Corruptione*) in Chinese terms. In this way, Aristotelian thought was able to be ‘introduced’ and appropriated into a Chinese context.

Consider the movement of Upanisadic texts from their ‘home’ (in Sanskrit) into Persian – from which the 1804 Latin translation (by Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron) was made (and from which, in turn, Schopenhauer and other philosophers of the early 19th century drew for their knowledge of Hindu philosophy). This migration began, as Jonardon Ganeri points out²⁵, in the mid 17th century, when the Mughal leader Dara Shukoh – because of his belief that there was an affinity between Hinduism and Islam – commissioned a Persian translation of the Upanisads. According to Ganeri, Shukoh believed that the Upanisads supplied answers to problems that he had encountered in his own studies of Sufism; indeed, he saw the *Upanisads* as providing a more detailed account of Sufi truths – “one spiritual adventure to which all the world is party.” This kind of inclusivism – and Shukoh’s assumption of a ‘notational congruence’ between Hinduism and Islam – allowed the Persian/Muslim reader of the Hindu texts “to appropriate the [Upanisadic] text as speaking about his or her own [Persian/Islamic] concepts, saints, and doctrines.” It also resulted in a reasonably faithful translation of the texts. Shukoh believed that “the stranger [i.e., here, the Hindu text] is a means by which we see ourselves more clearly” – i.e., it allows one to know oneself better – though he also held that (paradoxically) by “allowing itself to be so used...the migrating text [was able] to retain its own secrets.”²⁶

²⁵ Jonardon Ganeri, “Dārā Shukoh and the Transmission of the Upaniṣads to Islam,” in William Sweet, ed., *Migrating Texts and Traditions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012).

²⁶ Ganeri, “Dārā Shukoh and the Transmission of the Upaniṣads to Islam.”

Some Western scholars – indeed, an increasing number of them – have recently argued that there are many important similarities between Buddhism and Western ethical thought (e.g., particularly, contemporary neo-Aristotelianism). Both, for example, focus on the transformation of character, based on cultivating one’s ability to always ‘remember’ what one knows to be good when one is acting – i.e., based on a moral sensitivity or a capacity for discernment. While it is true that there are also notable differences between these traditions (e.g., in how one acquires virtue), and while some of the virtues identified may vary (e.g., compassion), the affinity of these traditions may, in part, explain how Buddhist traditions and texts have migrated and been appropriated – how they have come to the West in a way in which other Asian traditions have not – and why, for some philosophers, Buddhist thought may be seen as a way of completing the Aristotelian project.

Yet another example of the introduction of ‘foreign’ texts and traditions is that of the (primarily British) idealist tradition and its influence in India in the late 19th and particularly the early 20th century. A number of Indian scholars of the period – such as A.C. Mukerji, K.C. Bhattacharyya, G.K. Malkani, P.T. Raju, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – were introduced to Western philosophy during their university studies. As we have seen, not infrequently, their (European) teachers were critical of classical Indian or Hindu thought. In response, these scholars engaged that critique but, in doing so, they drew on the Western traditions for a vocabulary and a methodology and, in the process, provided either new interpretations of classical Indian thought or new philosophies that reflected elements of both Indian and Western traditions.²⁷ (A

²⁷ As an illustration of how another tradition may be drawn on in order to answer questions or challenges that others have about one’s own traditions, consider the example of Radhakrishnan.

Much of Radhakrishnan’s work was written in response to western ideas. Thus, in Radhakrishnan’s first publication (his M.A thesis, “The Ethics of the Vedanta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions”), we see an effort to challenge his teacher, A.G. Hogg’s claim that the Vedanta system had no room for ethics – that Hinduism in general and Vedanta in particular precluded a philosophical ethics and social responsibility. But Radhakrishnan did so by adopting the language and drawing on insights of European and American texts and authors, and bringing them into contact with his own tradition, in order to respond to the

number of other Indian philosophers, such as J.C.P. d'Andrade and Hiralal Halder, seem to have responded simply by adopting Western philosophy rather wholeheartedly.) Conversely, several of those European philosophers teaching in India not only engaged Indian thought, but came to develop a broadly sympathetic view of it (e.g., Alban Widgery, but also Hogg and Urquhart).²⁸

Lessons

These brief examples are, by themselves, only suggestive, but they provide more evidence for the claim that 'migration' and integration have, at least to some extent, occurred.

These examples also invite the question, however, why such migrations met with some success, for it seems that not every text or tradition has migrated – or can migrate. The answer to this question cannot be, arguably, simply a sociological one about the presence or knowledge of a text or tradition, or about a philosophical tradition being part of a larger economic or cultural colonialisation.

For example, although 'scholastic' – particularly, Thomistic – thought has been present for over 700 years, interest in it has

criticism. Specifically, Radhakrishnan brought Vedanta into contact with European/British idealist thought.

This response was, however, far from just an apologetic. In his two volume work, *Indian Philosophy* (vol. 1, 1923; vol. 2, 1927), Radhakrishnan defends a version of Absolute idealism – the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara – which he described as close to F.H. Bradley's and as the "crown" of Indian thought. While noting the importance of Indian philosophy for the modern world, in his Conclusion, Radhakrishnan acknowledges its "unprogressiveness" after the 15th century CE, and the paradox that, just as Indian thought was ceasing to appear "grotesque" to the West, it was becoming so in its homeland. In *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1939), Radhakrishnan argued at length against Albert Schweitzer's claim that, unlike Christian thought, Hindu thought is "World- and Life-Negating" – and Radhakrishnan offered a rationalistic and humanistic version of Hinduism that not only rejected withdrawal from the world, but made social action part of one's spiritual development.

While this constituted an apologetic for Indian thought, Radhakrishnan also insisted that "different religions have now come together," and that the solution to contemporary problems required "the recognition of the essential oneness of the modern world, spiritually and socially, economically and politically."

²⁸ See Widgery, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1923); Hogg, *The Christian Message to the Hindu* (London: SCM Press, 1947); Urquhart, *The Vedanta and Modern Thought* (London: H. Milford, 1928).

declined from the beginning of the modern period, and is now somewhat marginal. Indeed, in some regions, such as India and East Asia, despite the existence of Catholic educational institutions, scholasticism never seems to have been engaged. Again, while the interest in philosophical idealism has existed in some parts of Asia, today it is relatively limited and has – other than as a historical study – little presence in contemporary philosophy there. Further, while Asian philosophy, such as Buddhism, seems to be of increasing interest in North America today, it is still rather limited, and other philosophical traditions (such as Hinduism) do not seem to have had any significant impact on contemporary Western thought. In short, just as the apparent success of some ‘migrations’ invites reflection, so ought those instances of apparently limited or no success.

So what do the examples enumerated above tell us about the migration, appropriation, and integration of texts and traditions?

One point that seems to emerge is that, as a result of the introduction and employment of ‘foreign’ texts and traditions, we have instances of ‘new’ philosophies, and of approaches or methods that allow one to reaffirm or to ‘redo’ existing philosophies. The introduction and use of such texts sometimes shows the relevance or value of one’s tradition to other traditions – and to oneself. Or again, this may incite a return to the sources of one’s own philosophical tradition, and to contribute to a rethinking of that tradition, that may lead to both a deeper understanding of it but also growth.²⁹

For example, the migration of Buddhism into East Asia and, more recently, into North America has led to new schools of Buddhism – but also, for some, a way of complementing or contributing to schools in Western philosophy by dealing with what are perceived as inadequacies in them. Radhakrishnan’s engagement with Western thought, particularly idealism, allowed him not only to contribute to the revitalization of Advaita Vedanta within Hindu philosophy, but also to provide an interpretation of Hinduism that was able to engage Western thinking and to serve as a defence for Hindu ethics – and it likely also contributed to Radhakrishnan’s interest in the articulation and development of comparative philosophy. Or again, the effort by the 17th century Jesuits to make

²⁹ As we see in the case of Ram Mohan Roy, the migration of foreign philosophy into the Indian traditions was certainly designed to challenge those older traditions, and not just to propose an alternative to them.

Western philosophy more accessible, by starting with Aristotle but changing the mode of presentation, involved, at least *de facto*, developing a new strain of Aristotelianism – perhaps a more Platonic one – but also attempting to develop a new tradition in Chinese thought. Such migration can become the occasion for other ‘migrations’ and philosophical developments. As noted above, the availability of the Upanisads in Persian was the basis for the Latin translations which, in turn, allowed European scholars to have access to Hindu thought, and to engage or draw on it. There are many other such results. Indeed, there is a side-effect of this: as we see how a philosophy or a text or tradition migrates – what it does and what happens to it – this can serve to expand our understanding of that philosophy or text itself. (This is not without its problems, of course, since there may be a temptation by some to challenge ‘new’ readings as inauthentic or as ‘not getting the text right.’)

But the preceding analysis, by itself, while important and helpful in identifying certain traits, only seems to repeat the phenomenon – it does not explain it. It says nothing about texts and traditions that fail to migrate. Can anything more be said about when or why a text or tradition can migrate?

The preceding examples do not provide any explicit rule or guideline here. However, we do find the following features:

1. Only to the extent that a ‘recipient’ tradition or author is open to the integration of new insights – i.e., is not resistant to change – can texts or traditions migrate into, or be appropriated by, or contribute to ‘new’ philosophies.

2. Texts and traditions sometimes migrate because (or to the extent that) there are related traditions or philosophical schools or histories that are already present in the ‘recipient’ culture. Some philosophical traditions (e.g., rationalism, realism, and idealism) seem to be found, independently, in a range of cultures, and so the migration of cognate traditions is possible. (For example, parallels between Aristotelian and Mohist logic allow not only a comparison between them but, for each of these traditions, the possibility of drawing on the resources of the other tradition.) And some philosophical traditions – e.g., those that emphasise the empirical – may provide more initial ‘access points’ and be more likely to bridge (and therefore to migrate into) traditions and cultures.

3. Again, texts *and* traditions may migrate because (or to the extent that) there are underlying *concepts* – or, at least, concepts that are cognate – (such as ‘community,’ ‘duty,’ or ‘sacred’) that are already present in the ‘recipient’ culture. It may well be, then, that some concepts migrate more readily and more commonly than others.

4. Further, texts and traditions may migrate because (or to the extent that) they are responses to underlying *questions* that are also present in the recipient culture or tradition. Migration and appropriation seem most successful when texts and traditions are appealed to in order to address *specific* concerns, and they are successful and integrate to the extent that what frames and provides the context of that concern is (at least to some extent) also that of the text itself.

5. It may be that texts or traditions providing methodological approaches – being open, and not involving much content – have more opportunities to adapt to the recipient culture. Thus, when the tradition or text introduced serves, not as an answer but as a stimulus or mechanism for rethinking or addressing one’s own traditions (e.g., the use of hermeneutics in the study of classical Asian philosophy), it is more likely to be appropriated.

6. Migration and appropriation may be facilitated to the extent that one can ‘prepare’ a text or tradition so that it reflects one of the above features, or so far as one attempts to ‘reenact’ a text or ‘enact’ a method.

7. Finally, it would seem that a combination of as many of the preceding features as possible would indicate or lead to a genuine migration or appropriation.

The preceding factors, then, also suggest how we may be able to distinguish between real and apparent migrations.

Let me note two caveats.

First, this account is not to deny the political or sociological background to a migration, or the relevance of the ‘political’ context in which a text or tradition may be introduced or read. But this, by itself, I would claim, is not sufficient to explain what, exactly, it is in a text or tradition that migrates, integrates, and is appropriated, and why it does. There must also be at least some of the epistemological points indicated above. Second, not all ‘movement’ is a case of

integration and appropriation, and the mere presence of concepts and terms from one tradition in another is no evidence of a genuine migration or integration. (By way of example, consider those cases where a philosophical text seems to be simply that which occasions a philosophical insight or practice or discussion. Here, texts do not actually migrate; they simply are 'introduced' in different contexts by different communities of readers.)

Replying to Challenges

Do these examples and remarks help to address the challenges noted earlier? In some respects at least, it seems that they do.

First, recall the claim that philosophy is so culturally embedded that migration of texts and traditions is presumptuous.

But, as noted above, this seems to presuppose a rather rigid view of what constitutes (genuine) migration, engagement, and integration. If we expect the meaning and use of a term or concept or a philosophy to be univocal, or to remain unchanged from one culture to another, then we are sure to be disappointed. This, however, is not obviously what migration and integration require. Migration can (and, arguably, will) involve adaptation in the new environment. As it comes to have a place in a new culture, there can be an 'integrity' in the meaning of a term or in a tradition without it being 'identical' to what it was in its culture of origin. To determine whether a term or claim from another tradition can 'integrate,' perhaps all that one need do is to see how the terms are used, how the texts fit, and how claims are accepted and judged within the traditions of origin, and then attempt to see how the new context – i.e., the recipient culture – bears on these features.

This leads to the second challenge noted earlier. Recall the 'Collingwoodian' point that an 'answer' – and, by extension, a text or tradition – can be understood only if we know the question(s) that gave rise to it.

Such a challenge is forceful in those cases where one has a prior question in mind and, in taking a text or insight from another tradition or culture, one may well be unjustifiably *assuming* that it does or can provide an answer to that question. But migration of texts need not fall into this category. Carrying out a 'mini philosophical history' of the text or of the insight is precisely what a historian of philosophy would do – and, in this way, one may be able

to determine the meaning and the relevance of the answer – and the appropriateness or utility of the texts – to the question one has in mind.

The third, MacIntyrean, challenge claims that migration of texts and of arguments is often not merely unenlightening but problematic. Yet the possibility of looking outside one's tradition, and finding resources there to respond to the crises within one's tradition, is clearly part of MacIntyre's view. MacIntyre points out that traditions may experience "epistemological crises"³⁰ – times when practices or the tradition as a whole seems to run into a dead end. So, even though we are all rooted in a specific tradition, should we ever be confronted with certain grave problems or limitations, he writes, we might find ourselves turning to another outlook or tradition. When we do this, it is "not because this other view possesses some sort of transcendental truth or objective validity," but simply because it enables us to address problems in our own view, "and so constitutes an advance on it, in relative but not absolute terms."³¹

Such a move is not arbitrary. Indeed, according to MacIntyre, it is rational – something that a practically wise person would see – though the notion of rationality, here, remains internal to the tradition into which the new text or tradition has been introduced. It is in this way that MacIntyre believes one can talk about 'rationality' and 'progress' in ethics, and in philosophy in general – for to attempt to talk of 'rationality' or progress in any other way, he thinks, cannot but fail.

MacIntyre's warning, then, is not that we cannot go outside our traditions, but that we should be extremely careful in doing this. For, in order to have meaning and to be appropriated, the insights of the new texts and traditions have to come to have a genuine place within one's own tradition.

This account of migration and appropriation, and the response to the challenges, bear on several issues noted above, as well. For example, we may not need to be concerned about defining a tradition for, unless one is engaged in the history of philosophy,

³⁰ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 361.

³¹ Robert Stern, "MacIntyre and Historicism," in John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds., *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 151.

one's principal interest is simply in the key or dominant ideas or concepts within the tradition – i.e., the ideas or concepts for which the texts or the traditions are the vehicles. Perhaps one cannot separate texts from traditions because the words and phrases of the texts are themselves the bearer of traditions. Texts are indeed rooted in traditions, but also bear traditions. Traditions travel through, and are also a way of understanding, texts. But we may not need to understand a tradition or a text as a whole to make sense of the concepts employed.

This suggests, then, that we may not have to be concerned whether we can *separate* texts and traditions. This also suggests that we may not have to explain specifically the ways in which a text or tradition migrates. There are indeed different ways; the key issue is what is the text or tradition being used for. If we focus on this issue of 'purpose', we may be able to avoid some of the historical concerns.

There remain, of course, a number of other significant issues concerning the 'migration' and appropriation of texts and traditions. Are there criteria to distinguish genuine from merely apparent migrations (i.e., those cases where one finds the same words, but where the meanings and implications of the terms differ significantly, or contribute to ambiguity and, therefore, confusion)? To what extent is the character and purpose of the migration relevant to determining the appropriateness of the migration? Why do certain traditions migrate and integrate successfully, while others do not? And – since texts and traditions apparently can migrate – *ought* one to engage in an active process of drawing on texts from other philosophical traditions? These, however, are points for another investigation.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to engage a matter that is plausibly central to the possibility of an intercultural or a comparative philosophy – that of 'migrating texts and traditions.' If, as some hold, philosophy is rooted in, and inseparable from culture – i.e., if it cannot genuinely 'migrate' – it is difficult to see how philosophies can be compared, or how there can be some 'transcultural' "integrated outlook."

From the examples and instances enumerated above, however, there is little doubt that there has been migration – although perhaps not as much as one may have thought. In different ways, at different times, and to lesser and greater degrees, texts and traditions have been introduced into other cultures (e.g., as shown through the coining of new terms or the freeing of familiar terms from old meanings). These texts and traditions have not only migrated, but have been integrated, appropriated, or assimilated.

This issue is not, of course, simply a matter of historical interest.

Understanding the nature and conditions of such a phenomenon bears on how, today, a text or tradition may be brought into contact with authors or traditions from another culture. It is relevant to, for example, the interest – both popular and scholarly – in ‘Eastern’ philosophy in ‘the West,’ and to questions of whether ‘external’ views of moral knowledge and ethics can apply to, or simply confuse, contemporary philosophical debate.

The phenomenon of migrating texts and traditions also bears on the possibility of comparative and intercultural philosophy – how philosophers go outside their ‘home’ texts and traditions to study those of other cultures, and then return to their homelands to teach. This raises not just issues of linguistic or conceptual commensurability, relativism, and cultural diversity, but also to what extent new philosophical approaches might result. And further, by looking at how texts and traditions migrate, or fail to migrate, over time, we may understand better what it means to speak of a philosophical school or tradition.

The migration of texts and traditions is relevant today, then, so far as it promises to give rise to new philosophies, or to lead to doing ‘local’ philosophy differently, or to lead to a return to sources, or to reaffirm local philosophies. This phenomenon may also tell us something new about the text and tradition that has migrated. And, above all, this issue of migrating texts and traditions is important for – and indeed is central to – the project of an intercultural and a comparative philosophy.

Communicative Rationality and Cross-Cultural Communication¹

ANTHONY C. AJAH

Introduction

Habermas is right: “While analytic philosophy is itself overcoming itself, and phenomenology is unravelling, in these latter cases the end comes with the turn either to science or to *Weltanschauungen*.”² The end has come. The turn must be to *Weltanschauungen*. By the end here I mean the end of the exclusivist polarisation of the culture and peoples of the North and the South, the West and the East. But “what is the real issue?”³ I think that the real issue at this end is that it is of grave necessity that the history of thought devotes its attention, in our era, to the interaction among *Weltanschauungen* (understood here as ideologies, worldviews and conceptual frameworks which are elements of a people’s culture). This necessity is rooted in the fact that the deepening process of globalization, from its beginning up until (and beyond) its present form, makes the processes of intercultural encounters (in small and large scales) to be inevitable. These processes of encounter certainly

¹ *Abstract*: This paper argues that: (1) the *end* has come and the turn must be to *Weltanschauungen*; (2) in a world of consistently collapsing national boundaries – of unrestrained communication and interaction – Nietzsche’s and Derrida’s deconstruction and “différance,” with the resultant relativism, have proven to be lethal options; (3) since people of different nations must continue to interact in a *flat world*, then, intercultural encounters are inevitable; (4) over-emphasis on the plurality of cultures (multiculturalism), the relegation of the possibilities of the fusion of (cultural) horizons, and relativism, make intercultural encounters to be confrontational; (5) a *flat world* fundamentally requires cross-cultural communication towards reaching understanding and agreement; and for these reasons, (6) Habermas’ concept of communicative rationality as a cross-cultural paradigm provides, on the one hand, the critical and rational habit that will sustain a heterogeneity which challenges a destructive homogeneity, and on the other hand, a communicative predisposition which will give room for a homogeneity that links a variegated/scattered but productive heterogeneity.

² Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William M. Hohengarten (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 5-6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

present some opportunities. They also pose some challenges. Plurality of cultures (with claims of different forms of logic and rationality by different cultures) emerges as a facticity. Some of the features of this facticity are at the core of the challenges that result from the processes of globalization and intercultural encounters. Part of the challenges is that it appears there can be no centre (universalism) for the many cultural appearances (multiculturalism and relativism). The philosopher in such a time in history keeps transcending the given in search of new constructs and a new centre that can accommodate (as much as possible, for the time being) the so many cultures. Even in this regard, Habermas is right: "The reconstructive tasks of philosophy...are not in dispute."⁴

In the past, the word "barbarians" was used, at least very much more than today, to qualify people whose cultures/languages are unknown to those who regard them as barbarians. During such times, the chances of in-depth knowledge of a people about others and their culture(s) were very little. The accounts that most people knew about others and their cultures were those made available by their countrymen from voyages or on missions. However, centuries have come and passed; barriers have not only been bridged, but have collapsed. The developments in the information communication technology have contributed to make more real the process of globalization and the idea of the collapse of boundaries. Besides, inter-continental travels have been made so easy more than Columbus, Bartolomeu Dias, Vasco da Gama, and other sea explorers could have imagined. Thus, as people travel, read, watch, hear about and meet people of other cultures, cultures encounter themselves more frequently. Sometimes, there are *clashy* experiences.

While researchers on globalization like Thomas L. Friedman talk about *Globalization 3.0* and a flat world, which has led Samuel Huntington to project the clash of civilizations and the emergence of a mega culture, and Immanuel Wallerstein and others to concentrate on the idea of World System Research/Theory, the question of several cultures presents a glaring paradox of a flat world of unflattened cultures. The situation on ground – at least beginning from the post-colonial Afrocentric and Eurocentric struggles, up to the 9/11/2001 world experience and its aftermath – shows that the

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

results of intercultural encounters are about struggles “to be” or “not to be.” This is because these encounters have been confrontational, based on centrist perception of the “Others” as objects.

The “real issue” is that there are predominantly confrontational encounters among cultures. What is required is rather cross-cultural communications – beyond mere encounters. There is the need for the reconstruction of a perception and relation among subjects (in this case, cultures and peoples who own them) not as objects, but a perception that results to what Habermas refers to as a “self-relation arising out of an interactive context, a context that presupposes communication.” This reconstructive function is a social role of philosophy, as Max Horkheimer very rightly observed in his inaugural lecture as the head of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. In the case of the encounter between cultures, this reconstructive role is eclipsed by multiculturalism and relativism, which are preached mostly by anthropologists. In view of these, this paper argues that: (1) the *end* has come and the turn must be to *Weltanschauungen*; (2) in a world of consistently collapsing national boundaries – of unrestrained communication and interaction – Nietzsche’s and Derrida’s deconstruction and “différance,” with the resultant relativism, have proven to be lethal options; (3) since people of different nations must continue to interact in a *flat world*, then, intercultural encounters are inevitable; (4) over-emphasis on the plurality of cultures (multiculturalism), the relegation of the possibilities of the fusion of (cultural) horizons, and relativism, make intercultural encounters to be confrontational; (5) a flat world fundamentally requires cross-cultural communication towards reaching understanding and agreement; and for these reasons, (6) Habermas’ concept of communicative rationality as a cross-cultural paradigm provides on the one hand the critical and rational habit that will sustain a heterogeneity which challenges a destructive homogeneity; and on the other hand, a communicative predisposition which will give room for a homogeneity that links a variegated/scattered but productive heterogeneity.

Globalization 3.0: A Flat World

We have to keep facing ourselves more often, and in closer ranges, than we have ever done. This will continue – certainly, I think it will – until may be the “end of history” (whatever Fukuyama

meant by that). Globalization is here with us. In the views of Nayan Chanda, the 21st century exponential growth in the exchange of goods, ideas, institutions and people is part of a long-term historical trend. This is just the result of the continuous desire for something better and greater which has defined human history over the years. It is this desire that has motivated people to move themselves, their goods, and their ideas around the world. Chanda noted that since the first appearance of the term in 1962 'globalization' has gone from jargon to cliché. If properly defined and applied, the 'g-word', as he qualified it, actually does have some utility. It can best be understood as a leitmotif of human history. It is a trend that has intensified and accelerated in recent decades and come into full view with all its benefits and destructive power. Just as climate has shaped the environment over the millennia, the interaction among cultures and societies over tens of thousands of years has resulted in the increasing integration of what is becoming the global human community.

Still tracing the root of the word "globalization," Friedman recalled that thousands of years before 'globe', the root word for 'globalization' came into use, our ancestors had already spread across the earth. The process by which they migrated and populated all the continents except Antarctica was a kind of proto-globalization. Anthropological and historical findings continue to confirm the fact that more than some 50,000 years ago, early forms of homo sapiens began to travel from East Africa to the far corners of the world, including to the continents of North and South America. By the end of the ice age, rising sea levels resulted to the separation of the Americas from the Eurasian land mass, creating two worlds that were now cut off from each other. They would not be reconnected until 1492 when Christopher Columbus serendipitously landed on a Caribbean island. That same year a German geographer, Martin Behaim, built the first known globe as a representation of the earth. The reconnection was called the "Columbian exchange," and it is celebrated as a landmark in the history of globalization. The discovery of the New World brought together "peoples who had been separated for over 10,000 years...In the intervening period, societies have not only evolved in radically different ways and developed different economic and political structures, but they have also...most importantly, developed different languages and ways of

thinking. That diversity makes the job of reconnecting civilizations both challenging and rewarding.”⁵

Friedman is of the view that globalization has shrunk the world: from “Size Large,” through “Size Medium” (Globalization 1.0) and “Size Small” (Globalization 2.0), to “Size Tiny” (Globalization 3.0).⁶ According to van Binsbergen, we can define “globalisation as the social elaboration of the technological reduction – brought about towards the end of the twentieth century of the North Atlantic era – to practically zero, of time and place as limiting factors in human communication. In this way globalisation means a profound transformation of the contemporary experience.” He articulated some of these experiences as: “the panic of space”; “the panic of time”; “the panic of language”; “rebellion against old inequalities”; “the new object”; “virtualization of the experience”; “the new inequality”; “the new body”; and “proto-globalisation.” With regard to the panic of space, van Binsbergen noted that “the new home is nowhere, the new boundary is situational and constructed, the new identity is performative [multiculturality!]; the new other is – as a migrant, an applicant for refugee status, a fellow-European, a fellow world citizen.” And with regard to the panic of time, he described it as “discontinuity vis-à-vis the recent past, but especially the collapse of the spatial frameworks [the family, the work floor, the neighbourhood, the community, the country] within which, under the previous technologies of the past, a person’s activities were

⁵ Nayan Chanda, “What is Globalization?” *YaleGlobal*, 19 November 2002, accessed May 16, 2009, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/about/essay.jsp>. Chanda thinks that “globalization means reconnecting the human community”; and there are motives that direct this process of reconnection. Hence he held that “historically there were four main motives that drove people to leave the sanctuary of their family and village: conquest (the desire to ensure security and extend political power), prosperity (the search for a better life), proselytizing (spreading the word of their God and converting others to their faith), and a more mundane but still powerful force -curiosity and wanderlust that seem basic to human nature.” See also his well researched book, *Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers, and Warriors Shaped Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), where he argued basically and very interestingly that “the principal agents of globalization were soldiers (and sailors), traders, preachers and adventurers.”

⁶ See the excerpts from his interview with Nayan Chanda, “Globalization 3.0 Has Shrunk the World to Size Tiny,” *YaleGlobal*, 7 April 2004, accessed May 16, 2009, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=3653&page=1>.

practically confined as a context for the experience and for the budgeting of time, and therefore an embedding for 'the creation of values and meaning.'"⁷

The fact of globalization engages us in a "game" which – as the organisers of this conference appreciate, and Nayan Chanda agrees above – is very challenging. Due to the challenging character of this game, rules must be there, else the players destroy themselves in rough plays. To reduce such destruction, if we really want to (I chose "reduce" because the destructions have begun and are ongoing), these rules, as a matter of fact, must be obeyed. When the rules are not obeyed, there are wars, conflicts, and bombings; there are terrors and terrorist attacks. The situation is worsened because *we cannot back-off*: we are inevitably in it. And, I think that Thomas L. Friedman is right in stating (as he argued in an interview with Nayan Chanda) that "Terrorism" - even that of December 25th 2009 attempted by the 23 year old Nigerian - "may have put sand in its gears but Globalization won't stop."⁸ Only one alternative is left for us: we must play the game but(!) with its rules! The primary rule needs to be natural to us since the game is natural also to us. It should not be overlooked that the rules are necessary because the fact of being drawn closer to ourselves does not automatically resolve our differences.

The Paradox of a Flat World of Unflattened Cultures

No matter how shrinking the world is, there are so many cultures. This facticity (see Sartre and other existentialists on the concept of "facticity") of many cultures becomes glaring every day by day as opportunities of cultural encounters increase. The world is shrinking with the increasing ease of accessibility and smooth communication. It is flat. Yet, the world is not flat. What a paradox!

The more the opportunities to meet themselves avail themselves for human beings, the more some cultures are encountered, which makes the meetings either difficult or shallow, or even inhuman.

⁷ Wim van Binsbergen, "Some philosophical aspects of cultural globalisation – with special attention to Mall's intercultural hermeneutics" (paper prepared for the Dutch-Flemish Day of Philosophy with 'globalisation' theme, Catholic University Tilburg, 30 October 1999).

⁸ *YaleGlobal*, 3 February 2003, accessed May 16, 2009, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=870&page=1>.

Even as boundaries have collapsed, there are still hills posed by cultural differences. It seems then that nothing has been done. It seems as if the joyous shout at the collapse of the boundaries was not worth it – or may be that it was not time for it yet.

There are so many cultures! There are so many ways of perceiving the world and the peoples in it! There are so many ideologies and cultural practices! There are also, some argue, so many logics and rationalities! If we stretch this, one may rather say that with so many cultural differences, the idea of a flat world is false: if cultures make people, and people make the world, then the world is not flat. There is “the fact of pluralism,” which leads to the question of equality (in strength) of cultures – are some cultures better than others? The last idea of “which is better” is based on the question of self-assertion (the politics of recognition) that takes place in the presence of the “Others” (peoples and cultures). According to van Binsbergen, “Globalisation confronts us with the overwhelming plurality of homes, none of which is entitled any more to claim absolute validity, even though they may claim such absolute validity more eloquently and forcibly than ever (Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, human rights, natural science).” He agrees that the general assumption is that we are dealing here with a plurality of cultures. But he argues that cultures do not exist in the sense of discrete, bounded units which are closed onto themselves and which produce a total field of life. Instead, what is involved is a plurality of overlapping cultural orientations, in such a way that each person is always involved in a multiple of such orientations at the same time, while none of these orientations coincides with only one society or only one territory, many of them having a very wide distribution in space and even in time.

After our introduction of globalisation, van Binsbergen says:

This lead to the central philosophical question of the present argument. The globalisation process presupposes a plurality of domains which have been separately constructed and which have been internally structured by processes of signification which are predominantly embedded in language. Within a shared social political field, intensive communication is continuously brought about. The structuring of each of these domains is highly specific in cultural and linguistic

respect. Then how is it possible that intercultural knowledge is produced at all, and to boot in the language of only one of the languages involved in the intercultural encounter.⁹

Attempts to answer the questions like the ones raised by van Binsbergen lead us more properly into the core issues of this paper. They are issues of intercultural encounters, multiculturalism and relativism.

Intercultural Encounters, Multiculturalism and Relativism

Globalisation reveals the pluralism of “gods and demons.” The politics of recognition that understandably follows moments of encounter among these “gods” and “demons” (and their worshippers) generally leads to the struggles to be or not to be, where to stay, with whom to stay, under what conditions, which may include questions like “Are you better than I am?” or, in some cases, imposed assertions like “I am better than you are,” “my views are superior,” “my way of life is superior,” and so on. In cases of the questions like the one posited here, or assertions like the ones included here also, arguments can ensue. Feelings of threatened identities will be the order of the day in such situations. In view of this, Habermas notes that:

The confusion of lines of arguments is much more drastic in controversies among adversaries who, feeling that their identity is threatened by the others’ fundamental convictions, struggle with rhetorical weapons. Scarcely anyone would disagree that such distances and oppositions have increased and intensified in the modern age, which has itself become a philosophical topic of the first rank since the eighteenth century. Individuals, groups, and nations have drifted far apart as regards their backgrounds of biographical and sociocultural experience. This pluralization of diverging universes of discourse is part of specifically modern experience; the shattering of naïve consensus is the impetus for what Hegel calls “the experience of reflection.” We cannot simply wish this away; we can only negate it. In the framework of our culture, invested as it is

⁹ Wim van Binsbergen. “Some philosophical aspects of cultural globalisation.”

with reflection, the thrust of this experience has to be worked through not only politically but also philosophically.¹⁰

This is the “real issue”! It is the question of “what happens when peoples and cultures encounter themselves?” Most times, there are immediate demands for self-assertion, self-recognition, and respect for one’s views, culture and values. The fact of pluralism dawns on us. And, Derrida is correct that our perception of reality as a whole keeps differing. The complexity of the world in which we exist, of its several and continuously “emerging” micro-components, and of whatever efforts we are making to grasp the entire reality, dawns on us also.

Paul Cilliers gives attention to this question of complexity, from point of view of grasping reality. He wrote: “Different epistemological positions interact and compete with one another.”¹¹ He argues that there is a critical understanding of complexity which holds that complexity theory does not provide us with exact tools to solve our complex problems, but it shows us (in a rigorous way) exactly why these problems are so difficult. He outlined the features of complex systems, some of which I find relevant for this paper: (a) complex systems are open systems; (b) they operate under conditions not at equilibrium; (c) complex systems consist of many components. The components themselves are often simple (or can be treated as such); (d) components on average interact with many others. There are often multiple routes possible between components, mediated in different ways; (e) complex systems display behaviour that results from the *interaction* between components and not from characteristics inherent to the components themselves. This is sometimes called emergence. (f) More than one description of a complex system is possible. Different descriptions will decompose in different ways. Different descriptions may also have different degrees of complexity. Based on the above features, Cilliers wrote that if one considers the implications of these characteristics carefully, a number of insights and problems arise:

1. The *structure* of a complex system enables it to behave in complex ways...

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, ed. Maeve Cooke (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 403-404.

¹¹ Paul Cilliers, “Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism,” *Theory, Culture and Society*, 22, no. 5 (2005), p. 255.

2. Since different descriptions of a complex system decompose the system in different ways, the knowledge gained by any description is always relative to the perspective from which the description was made. This does not imply that any description is as good as any other. It is merely the result of the fact that only a limited number of characteristics of the system can be taken into account by any specific description. Although there is no a priori procedure for deciding which description is correct, some descriptions will deliver more interesting results than others.

3. In describing the macro-behaviour (or emergent behaviour) of the system, not all the micro-features can be taken into account. The description is a reduction of complexity.

For a more detailed analysis of his concept of complexity and its relation to our framework and knowledge-claims, Cilliers noted that the above insights have important implications for the knowledge-claims we make when dealing with complex systems. To *fully* understand a complex system, we need to understand it in all its complexity. We cannot have complete knowledge of complex systems; we can only have knowledge in terms of a certain framework. We *choose* our frameworks. This choice need not be arbitrary in any way, but it does mean that the status of the framework (and the framework itself) will have to be continually revised. Our knowledge of complex systems is always provisional. We have to be modest about the claims we make about such knowledge.¹²

When there is no modesty in our presentation of our knowledge-claims about our complex globe – flattening yet unflattened – then the clashes and confrontations that relativism and superiority claims predispose us for will prevail. Then some cultures will insist that they are superior and that it is their *burden* to make every other people and culture to *be them*. Then, the problem of hegemony will set in.

The concept of “hegemony” refers to the political, ideological, economic and military processes by which, in the interaction between social groups or categories, one social group or category effectively reduces – often to practically zero – the possibilities of

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.

other social groups or categories for defining their own goals, priorities, destiny, and for realising these. The dominant group or category makes instead the other social groups or categories subservient to the realisation of the goals, priorities, destinies, of the dominant group.¹³

Any form of hegemony is a sign of mania. If it is cultural hegemony, then it is a form of self-projection – on the part of the person or group imposing itself. It is a form also of self-deception, a form of false-consciousness. Such a group of “imposers” deserve to be attended to by psychoanalysts. Multiculturalism is real. The growing pluralism of “gods and demons” is real. According to Vincent Shen:

It is well recognized that we live in an age of multiculturalism. As I see it, the concept of “multiculturalism” should mean, of course, but not only, a request for cultural identity and respect for cultural difference, as Charles Taylor seems to be contented with. Charles Taylor’s interpretation limits his own concept of multiculturalism to a kind of “politics of recognition.” For me, multiculturalism means, of course, that each and every culture has its own cultural identity, and that we should respect each other’s cultural differences. But it should mean, above all, mutual enrichment by cultural difference and search for more universalizable elements embodied in various expressions. We can attain this “upgraded” meaning of multiculturalism only through conducting dialogues between different cultural worlds.¹⁴

Binsbergen acknowledges the inequality that forms the basic assumptions of some models of knowledge-creation like the model used by anthropologists.¹⁵ No one doubts that multiculturalism and relativism thrive very comfortably in the anthropological model.

¹³ Wim van Binsbergen, *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological Lessons towards a Philosophy of Interculturality* (London: LIT Verlag, 2003), p. 17.

¹⁴ Vincent Shen, “Intercultural Philosophy, Confucianism, Taoism” (address, Annual Meeting of Dutch/Flemish Association of Intercultural Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 27 November 1998).

¹⁵ Wim van Binsbergen, *Intercultural Encounters*, p. 18.

Such model, however, needs to be controlled through the critical tool of philosophy. Anthropological reports are not philosophical analysis, and should not be regarded as such. The model they provide is not a solution for our world today because it does not create the context within which the mutual enrichment and upgrading of cultures can occur, as Shen suggests.

Beyond Encounters, to Cross-Cultural Communication: What Can Intercultural Philosophy Do?

Anyone conversant with the history of thought will agree that the “reign” of post-metaphysical thinking made people and thinkers to refrain from presenting a substantial conception of an exemplary life-style that is plainly authoritative for *everyone*.¹⁶ Consequently, people are afraid to be termed “universalists” or be referred to as being “authoritarian.” What is termed “post-metaphysics” led to the collapse of any concept of one absolute truth. The consequence was relativism. And, relativism feeds the idea of people being afraid to suggest exemplary life-style for everyone. To take care of this fear, some philosophers who prefer the anthropological and artistic models are bold to argue that there are so many cultures and that each of them deserves to be respected. The concept of multiculturalism was immediately available for use to express this unnecessary boldness and courage which deceptively covers a latent fear that should be confronted. This is further backed by the modern liberal arguments about “equal treatment” of peoples and cultures, and of arguments about “human dignity” of peoples and of cultures. No matter how this fear is covered, the process of globalization consistently points at the inadequacy of the bold expression of some conceptions of multiculturalism and relativism. According to Habermas, there is the suspicion that: “equal treatment of cultures” remains closely attached to the anthropocentric and secularist thinking of the enlightenment and humanism; and hence that, in the course of its implementation, it must deny the “neutrality of aim” with respect to other forms of life and worldviews.¹⁷

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, “Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism,” trans. Jeffrey Flynn, *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2005), p. 2.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Equal Treatment of Cultures,” p. 23.

Arguing for what he refers to as modesty in our epistemological claims about our complex world, Cilliers held that the place of deconstruction should be obvious. He submitted that deconstruction argues for the irreducibility of meaning. Meaning and knowledge cannot be fixed in a representational way, but is always contingent and contextual.¹⁸ Knowledge is provisional. We cannot make choices and thus, we cannot escape the normative or ethical domain.¹⁹ But Cilliers seems to have forgotten in the above statements that if we must move on meaningfully in the type of world in which we have seen ourselves, we have to “choose our frameworks” as he even agreed earlier. We have to do so with the hope of continual revisions. After all, what are social philosophers supposed to do if not to offer prescriptions for social improvements? We must keep prescribing while choosing along the line frameworks, descriptions and interpretations (using Cilliers’ concepts) that, as Cilliers stated earlier, “deliver more interesting results.” Even though “Limiting frameworks makes it possible to have knowledge (in finite time and space)” and also, “At the same time, having limits means something is excluded, and we cannot predict the effects of that exclusion,”²⁰ it is very clear from the potentialities we have as human beings that we do not need to just stop at the observation that there are exclusions. We naturally have what it takes to keep including what is excluded. Cilliers, despite his arguments, agrees to this when he submitted that: “It is important that we start imagining better futures, and for that we need better imaginations.”²¹ I think, therefore, that these better imaginations will continually yield improved and more interesting ways of including what was previously excluded. That is one of the basic fruits of what I have termed cross-cultural communication beyond mere encounter.

¹⁸ Derrida, in his “Différance,” quotes Saussure in admiration as the one “who first of all set forth the arbitrariness of signs and the differential character of signs as principles of general semiology and particularly of linguistics...’Arbitrariness and differential’ says Saussure, ‘are two correlative qualities.’” Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Continental Philosophy Reader*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mara Ramweten (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 448.

¹⁹ Paul Cilliers, “Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism,” p. 259.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

²¹ *Ibid.*

It is when we merely encounter that we emphasise the difficulties in merging emerging horizons. It is when we merely encounter, and acknowledge only in theory the strength of our imaginations, that we limit the possibilities of grander horizons and frameworks that make our imagination of a better future to be more and more inclusive. No one has a sustainable reason to doubt that knowledge is provisional. With the complexity of our world, no one is in doubt also that to communicate meaningfully, in a shared lifeworld that has a global character, we need to acknowledge that we are playing in the “theatre of difficulty.” If we cannot escape the normative domain, we must then construct it. But how do we construct them if we over-emphasise the difference and deference of meaning against the possibilities of fusing meanings and horizons? Once again, Habermas appreciates the problem at hand when he noted that:

Forms of life are totalities that always emerge in the plural. Their coexistence may cause friction, but this *difference* does not automatically result in their *incompatibility*. Something similar is the case for the pluralism of values and belief systems. The closer the proximity in which competing “gods and demons” have to live with each other in political communities, the more tolerance they demand; but they are not incompatible. Convictions can contradict one another only when those concerned with problems define them in a similar way, believe them to require resolution, and want to decide issues on the basis of reason.²²

Making reference to the intercultural hermeneutics of Mall, van Binsbergen noted that at the stage in which the world has found herself, the important thing is to tolerantly acknowledge that the other differs from that which one considers one’s own. This is the aim of intercultural philosophy. Hence, van Binsbergen noted that “Philosophy is the dialogical development of a special language which expresses, in an innovative manner, aporias of the human experience in the philosopher’s own historical situation (although

²² Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, Maeve Cooke, ed. (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998), p. 405.

such expression usually include partial references to other times and other places).²³ But, van Binsbergen does not seem to very well appreciate the idea that language has a role to play in intercultural communication. He argues that for the unsuitability of language as a medium for intercultural communication:

language is the most subtly and intolerantly structured – allow the pronunciation of one phoneme to fall just outside the range of tolerance, and an entire word becomes unintelligible – put the intonation slightly differently, commit a minor grammatical error, and an entire sentence is rendered unintelligible, erroneous, ridiculous, or at least obtains a totally different meaning...This means that of all human product language is least suitable as a medium of intercultural communication, and least reliable as a touchstone of whether such intercultural communication has in fact been established.²⁴

Van Binsbergen may sound to be right in saying that language is not suitable as a *medium* of intercultural communication. Linguistic turn as Habermas practiced, and as I think is relevant, is not a turn to language as a medium, but as providing a paradigm. This is why Habermas refers to this turn as “formal pragmatics.” The turn to language is because of the framework that it provides to enhance social relation, not at all because of any hope that it will enable the mutual communication of cultural elements – even though it still does this despite its so-called “intolerable structure.”

Shen draws our attention to the possible role of philosophy in its intercultural mode. He submits that the real objective of doing intercultural philosophy is to “put into contrast between, rather than sheer comparison of, different philosophical traditions.” Very well, Shen understands “contrast” as the rhythmic interplay between “difference and complementarity, continuity and discontinuity.” It is this play that he hopes will gradually lead to real mutual-enrichment of different traditions.²⁵ As a matter of priority, Habermas observes

²³ Wim van Binsbergen, “Some philosophical aspects of cultural globalisation.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Vincent Shen, “Intercultural Philosophy, Confucianism, Taoism,” 2000.

that the difficulties surrounding the realization of such enrichment is surmountable bearing in mind that:

[F]rom the perspective of a participant, however, one's own standards of rationality must always claim general validity, which one can be restricted only subsequently from the perspective of a third person. In short, the interpretive reconstruction of reasons requires that we place "their" standards in relation to "ours," so that in the case of a contradiction we either revise our preconceptions or relativise "their" standards of rationality against "ours." These preconceptions do indeed lead to the rather "strong" thesis that we *cannot* understand reasons without at least implicitly evaluating them.²⁶

The greater advantage that Habermas' theory of communicative rationality offers is that it predisposes us to learn to move from mere encountering to communicating. Communication here should also be seen as a form of giving such that the one who encounters, by acknowledging the validity of the "other" and his claims, simultaneously gives and accepts his identity. This giving does not stop at this. The identity is also not yet well explained at the early moments of the giving that follows the communication that itself should follow the process of encountering. The giving continues both in the deeper process of communication that follows subsequently from encountering, and in the superior moments of understanding, exchange, and then agreement among cultures. Seen this way, communicative rationality invites us to the giving, the communicating, the understanding, the exchange, and the agreement across cultures. This, certainly, is more human and promising than the relativist paradigm which supports the "eugenic" struggle "to be" or "not to be," "to subsume" or "to be subsumed," "to kill" or "to be killed." Against such a lethal paradigm, and to buttress the relevance of his theory, Habermas thinks that we can keep constructing and reconstructing our philosophical theories in our era with the single aim to come up with theories of rationality that are supposed to account for why and in what sense we can still connect

²⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, pp. 416-417.

our convictions as well as our descriptive, normative, and evaluative statements with a transcending validity claim that goes beyond mere local contexts. Thus, I think that Habermas' concept of communicative rationality as a cross-cultural paradigm provides, on the one hand, the critical and rational habit that will sustain a heterogeneity which challenges a destructive homogeneity, and on the other hand, a communicative predisposition which will give room for a homogeneity that links a variegated/scattered but productive heterogeneity.

There may be very valid questions of what one should do in a situation where the supposed partner in dialogue/communication process is not ready for communication but is simply pre-occupied with how to eliminate his partner. Is it not better to eliminate him first? Is it not better also, instead of insisting on communication with one who is not ready even to tolerate your views, to get one's self armed like this "partner" who is rather not ready to communicate or dialogue anything? Is it not better to build walls like Israel has done? What are we expected to do, and how do we keep being safe in voicing out our critique of the inadequate in situations where if you speak against certain ideologies, you become an enemy and you are targeted to be killed? Is communication really an option? Can it stand alone in the midst of violence? Is it not better to confront the violent with violence? How do we get a partner who is not ready for communication to come to the dialogue table?

These questions are valid, very valid. They are very relevant. I think that they are the core, not only of this paper, but at the core also of the general theme of this conference and the objectives of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (CRVP). There are certain facts, I repeat, "facticities," that we in the 21st century cannot wish away. These include: (1) Globalization is inevitable – it has gone so complex that it is unstoppable; (2) Isolationism (even in the form of building fence) is not a feasible option, and (3) War and acquisition of arms should only be as a matter of self-defence.

It is the role of philosophers – not of diplomats who must be careful not to soil their relationships – to get at the root of how one ideology is better suitable for meaningful co-existence than another. They should and must, like Plato, keep voicing out what reason has led them to know. Through rational analysis of facts, realities around us yield some of their keys to us. If we consider too much the

difficulties surrounding our use of these keys, we will not make use of them. Imagine if every nation and society responds to her critiques violently, then you will better understand how war and violence are the worst of our options – except, I reiterate, as a matter of self-defence. Facts surrounding the effects of the radiation from the bombs dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki since 1945 remind us also that the acquisition of arms should be a last option.

The Nigerian youth who tried to bomb the America-bound airline was studying in London. He moved from Yemen, through Ethiopia, then Ghana, then Lagos, then Amsterdam and finally, to Detroit. The process of globalization has gone so complex that even though Israel has built a wall against Palestinians, she has also not built walls against others who may come from other unsuspecting countries. Whoever it was that the Nigerian youth of 25th December 2009 (Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab) was working for, the US government and security system never figured out that the person in Yemen would employ the “selfless suicidal services” of a young Nigerian student studying in London. Thus, I ask: *“Isolation! From whom and not from whom?!”* Then, I make a heavy claim that the complexity of globalization has destroyed isolationism as an alternative.

Yet, globalization can still serve our purpose! One of the ways – very difficult and long-term though – to get those who are violent because their ideology is criticised to the communication realm is to gradually let them know that theirs is not *the only* ideology/conceptual framework. What I mean is that such people need to know, or at least begin by becoming aware, that there are alternative ideologies. From awareness, they can gradually begin to accept it as a fact. Philosophers are expert knowledge creators. Most of us are university lecturers. We are knowledge creators and disseminators. The problem at hand requires the search for deeper ways of getting the idea of “plurality of gods and demons” into the curriculum of studies of every university – not just departments of philosophy. What a different man I have been since 2005 when Joseph Agbakoba of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, taught me about ideologies! Many people present in this conference are well placed in their institutions. They can push for this. This can be done. If this is taken seriously, any student in this century should be

opportune to know that there are others who see reality in other ways.

It is only one who knows that the “other” has views as he has – that is, that there are alternative ideologies – that can compare and contrast between his and the others’ ideologies, and thus be able to bulldoze his ideological blockages. This knowledge of the other’s ideologies is the primary disposition that makes communication possible. It is the primary disposition that gradually enables one, one day, to consider what works better in the other’s ideologies to incorporate it – as Shen and Habermas suggest, and, instead of being ideologically blocked/closed, to make adjustments in his own after some critical assessment (whether the critique is from outside or from within).

You, knowledge creators, lecturers in institutions of higher learning, are the hope of the 21st century cross-cultural communication. A TV show in the form of news or commentary may be received with some very conscious and unnecessary defensive mechanism, which is a form of psychological imbalance. But, by discussions in classrooms and conferences, after due analysis that keeps very well aside any form of argument by attack of “the person,” we will be more likely, I think, able to open the door to self-reflection and critique. When young university students get to this level of awareness of the other as a cultural being and a partner in communication, they will return to their homes/countries as international students in some cases, to spread this awareness. For the past five years or so, there have been some previously unimaginable reactions against some systems in some countries. Iran is an example. Most of those pushing for these changes are graduates from some universities outside their homes.

Openness to criticism and change is a sign of maturity. Philosophy is old. Philosophy is critical. Philosophy is mature. An intercultural philosophy should spread its mature feature. It should help to make cultures to grow from their closures to openness. This is what must be attained, what Habermas advocates, before cross-cultural communication is possible. Cross-cultural communication is a necessity. Therefore, this maturity that makes openness possible is a primordial necessity. It is the paradigm which Habermas refers to as a rationality that is communicative. If the 21st century world must tame terrorism and confrontational cultural encounters, philosophers

should teach this maturity. Students as future leaders should be led through this path.

Above all, if only we can be consistent in voicing out our critique of the faulty aspects of certain ideologies, then, though the solution I am offering here is long-term, it will yield some very good results in the final analysis. Our consistency may require that there be martyrs for truth – the truth that some aspects of some ideologies in our era are anti-social and anti-human. The martyrdom of these martyrs will be meaningful only if they are consistent.

Conclusion

Any committed intercultural philosophy must, first of all, appreciate the need for, and do its best to provide, the theoretical foundation that should be the follow-up to the fact that the Indian-born British writer and poet, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), has been proven wrong – it is no longer valid to simply say: “East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.” No doubt the cardinal points and their geographical demarcations remain where they are, but they meet, in our time, without barriers! Considering the views of Habermas that “of course, there are tribal societies and forms of life and also cultic practices that do not fit with the political framework of an egalitarian and individualist legal order,”²⁷ and that of Binsbergen: “Knowledge production is never neutral but either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, i.e. reinforcing a particular hegemonic structure, or seeking to explode that structure,”²⁸ I conclude this paper by submitting that it is within a rational context where claims are refuted that hegemonic structures can be made to explode. It is also within the same structure that, by means of consistently improved method and results of knowledge production, frameworks which have inhuman results will give way for, or at least be improved as a result of, their communicative encounter with frameworks that are more egalitarian and more human.

Discourse critics are wrong. In a global world like ours, the only rule left for the game that we must play in the process of meeting ourselves and our cultures is the rule of free communication which gives room for discussions towards not just reaching understanding,

²⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Equal Treatment of Cultures,” p. 23.

²⁸ Wim van Binsbergen, *Intercultural Encounters*, pp. 17-18.

but also agreement. And, since language gives us the context and tool to communicate, it presents itself as the natural and pragmatic option for transcending our contexts and differences, making intercultural communication possible while offering more and more opportunities. Consequently, the specific role of an intercultural philosophy, which Habermas, in my opinion, has provided a good framework for, is to strive for “a balancing act between misplaced universality and distressing relativistic fragmentation.”²⁹ Habermas has done this by his presentation of the social order as a network of cooperation involving commitment and responsibility – the two dispositions that prove terrorism and terrorist attacks to be forms of stupidity. Knowledge creators and Universities as institutions of knowledge creation remain our last hope.

²⁹ Wim van Binsbergen, “Some philosophical aspects of cultural globalisation.”

Part VI
Hermeneutics as the Role of Philosophy,
and as a Principle of Intercultural
Encounters

Intercultural Philosophy in Consultation with a Hermeneutic Approach to Natural Science: An African Perspective

EVARISTUS E. EKWEKE

Introduction

Philosophy,¹ hermeneutics² and natural science³ are siblings in the intellectual scheme of things. This does not mean that they are co-terminous. Their differences are not so variegated any more than the fact that they converge very often in semblance of some intellectual culture. In our present endeavor, we consider philosophy apt enough to co-ordinate activities that bring hermeneutics, natural science and culture together. "Culture" is an eclectic word in all its ramifications. And if one ventures to put into focus this eclecticism, culture becomes intellectually charged in order to seek and find like happenstances (event and activity) in eclectic time and space. When this happens, normally involving humans, intercultural comes to the

¹ A concise definition of "philosophy" is largely illusive. Even though classical depictions touch on the etymological components of this definition, it still lacks a general representation of the imports of philosophy on a general level. However, we can appeal to some philosophical antiquity. The famous two Greek words "Philos" meaning "love" and "Sophia" meaning "wisdom" always combine to give you "Love or lover of wisdom." However, philosophy quests for ultimate realities. In our context, "Philosophical activities that appeal particularly to the surgery of thought processing is only germane in the current African struggle for some authenticity." E.E. Ekweke, "Editor's Note," *Oche-Amamihe, Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (2006).

² See T.I. Okere, *African Philosophy, A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility* (Boston: University Press of America, 1983), 15. See also J.O. Oguejiofor, "Negritude as Hermeneutics. A Reinterpretation of Leopold Sedar Senghor's Philosophy," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83, no.1 (2009), 80. See also E.E. Ekweke, "Can there be an African Philosophy of science? An Appeal to the Hermeneutical," in J.O. Oguejiofor and G.I. Onah, eds., *African Philosophy and the Hermeneutics of Culture: Essays in Honour of Theophilus Okere* (Muster: Lit Verlag, 2005), pp. 196-197.

³ T.O. Okere, *Church, Theology and Society in Africa* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 2005), p. 22.

foreground. In the event of this situation, culture assumes different roles. One of these is that of encountering other cultures. And this is where one can classify intercultural. Even given this, intercultural is not a lone ranger in aspects of culture. Since it involves two or more cultures, it has the character of being in quest of the contacts of each culture in the process of interaction. So what would philosophy be doing with culture and intercultural as they concern hermeneutics and natural science? Philosophy is a rational discipline. That is why its role in culture and intercultural would appeal to the relevance of difference and interactions as aspects of interrelations. Philosophy, while making reference to hermeneutics, will seek to find how the ultimate realities in intercultural indices would implicate worthwhile ontological relevancies. Philosophy would also, and in our perspective, confront natural science, as it involves itself in this exercise of making cultures confront themselves. Thus, a philosophical appeal to the culture of natural science in the sense of co-lateral and multilateral relations is to be involved.

In all these, our discourse will be contextual through philosophy and culture. And as Theophilus Okere has argued, "A context or culture is a matrix of interrelated components. It creates a perspective or points of view that highlight some elements while marginalizing others. A shift in context or perspective might highlight some other elements that were formally marginalized."⁴ This means limiting our thinking to some perspective where perspective in this sense explains context. In this guise, the issue of contexts does not prejudice cinematic mutations in the same context that strikes a balance between paradigm shifts⁵ and piece-meal⁶ progressive indices that are harbored in the same context. In the sense of intercultural, there exists and should exist some rapprochements between contexts, if cultures appeal to a global and or eclectic interventions. This intellectual attitude would translate marginalization in respect of particularities in the sense of culture where text and contexts play specific roles. And it is the role of

⁴ D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 146.

⁵ See T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 43-52.

⁶ See K.R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 58 and 64.

context to highlight this. Thus, in our paper, culture and context would confront philosophy and science, using hermeneutic underpinnings to drive home their claims, while not forgetting that Africa as a continent should have a lot to do with all these. In the wake of this thinking, indices that provoke a given economic-philosophical analysis may have to be employed. This is party to the kind of progressive thinking this paper wants to highlight.

Culture and Interculture

In ordinary parlance, culture is said to be “the entire way of life of a people.”⁷ But the meaning of culture is more macrocosmic than this. The issue of the entire way of life, when defined, bring about certain specificities that, when highlighted, throw more light on the imports of culture. For Tradition, ethos, animate and inanimate characteristics whose existence elastically carries between the guise and the real, individual and collective world views are all involved in the meaning, definition and description of culture. T. Okere quotes the anthropologist E.B. Taylor as saying that culture is “that complex whole that includes knowledge and know-how, belief, art, ethics, law, custom and all other capabilities and usages which man has acquired as a member of society.”⁸ If culture is anything to go by, it is borne of a myriad of societal microcosms. Culture in this case is a socio-macrocosm. It enlists the services of aspects of societal ingredients that find expression in the one nucleic index called “culture.” As a matter of example, I have outlined elsewhere the semblance of uniqueness in a given large space of region. So, for instance, it is noticeable that Africa is not used to the kind of individualism that is now the lot of the occupants of the Northern Hemisphere. “The myth of African uniqueness finds expression in some dynamism of the spirit that involves the African person. This however, does not vitiate the existence of anthropologies of sorts in Africa. But note that from the *Ka* (ancient Egypt) in North Africa to *Chi* (Igbo [Nigeria]), *Ori* (Yoruba [Nigeria]) and *Okra* (Ewe, Asante [Ghana]) of the West African peoples, the dynamic emergence of the

⁷ N.N. Edozien, “Knowledge Transfer across Cultures: Incultural and Intercommunicative Dialogue as a Fundamental Human Right,” in O.F. Ike, ed., *Globalization and African Self-Determination* (Enugu: CIDJAP Publications, 2004), p. 33.

⁸ E.B. Taylor, quoted in T.I. Okere, *Church, Theology*, p. 58.

human person is defined by the homogenous character of the collective commonness of the Community. The 'Person' and the 'Other' are one."⁹ Thus, even though there is not just one culture in Africa, there are as many as there are peoples in Africa,¹⁰ there exists gross sameness of human ideological and geographical features. The above example, given in respect of African culture, exposes the arguments of many authors in terms of the meaning of culture. Regarding this, therefore, culture is understood as "the totality of a people's institutions, traditions and customary practices regarding all acquired habits, capabilities and abilities. Each people has a geographically given environment which they occupy providing the base, space and resources for interaction and sustenance; the enabling climatic and vegetative conditions as well as accumulated font of knowledge, theoretical and technical for technological transformation of their environment."¹¹ The foregoing presents culture as an eclectic index. It does not begin and end in the human person in a given corner of the world. It is not peculiar to an extraordinarily unique geographical end of the earth. It is not found in only one aspect of customs and tradition. Rather, culture is that whole presence that universally appeals to the geography, the philosophy, the literature, the ethic, the ethnology, the anthropology and the technology of a people.

But there is also an interculture, a worthy scion of culture. If interculture has any positive import, it is thanks to culture. And lest we forget it, a good and seasoned person, place or thing is said to be cultured. So it is also in interculture. It excels where humans, who are intelligent observers of constituents in nature, judge it to be worthwhile. The definition is not far-fetched from our definition of "culture" above. Thus, interculture is nothing but a cross fertilization of cultures. This brings two or more cultures into focus. Many authors¹² talk about "Culture shock," "Culture contact," clash of cultures and like phrases. Interculture, therefore, deals with not just one culture. It involves the person through whom the contact is

⁹ E.E. Ekweke, "Editor's Note," *Oche-Amamihe, Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (2006), p. viii.

¹⁰ T.I. Okere, *Church, Theology*, p. 58.

¹¹ A.M. Ogoko, "Globalization, the Media and Cultural Emasculation," *Journal of Nigerian Language and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2006), pp. 32.

¹² See N.N. Edozien, "Knowledge Transfer across Cultures," pp. 44-48.

made between cultures. As we have rightly observed, every people has a culture. And as peoples interact with themselves, intercultural occurs through interpersonal and intercultural relationships. Authors¹³ have argued that intercultural carries with it some positive and some negative implications. Examples abound.¹⁴ The history of humanity vehemently suggests that intercultural relations between, particularly, so called advanced cultures and so called developing ones were, at least, at the beginning of the contacts not so cordial.¹⁵ This intercultural complication has had to instigate debates of sorts. A great many critics have laid blames, for the negativity of this exercise, on the host culture¹⁶ and its custodians. Others are mad in their criticism against the visiting culture¹⁷ and those who uphold the said visiting culture. We recall at this juncture, that implication and or effects or, better put, consequences, of intercultural have played significant roles in world history. Such civilizations as the Greek and Roman civilizations carried power, supremacy and domination with them. Other civilizations that were worthy scion of these were the English, the French and the Dutch that also brandished sovereignty and Lordship in forms of slavery¹⁸ and colonialism¹⁹ in terms of relationships between their cultures and their host cultures. These are spates of intercultural that carry far reaching consequences with them. There are also individuals of intercultural that have given birth to many results. Those who argue for this have talked about given cross-cultural fertilization that has benefited both the host and the guest cultures. A situation has arisen where both assimilation and

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See E.E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church, Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 22 ff.

¹⁶ See F.O.C. Njoku, "African Identity, its Metaphysics and Ethic," *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies* 11 (2008), pp. 15 ff.

¹⁷ See J.D. Cochrane, "Culture, Poverty and Development: A Response to Professor Kankwena's Paper on Globalization and the need for Development leadership in Africa," in O.F. Ike, ed., *Globalization and African Self Determination*, pp. 172 -184.

¹⁸ See E.E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, pp. ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22. ff.

civilization have maimed both civilization and development,²⁰ thanks to a given amiable interaction between two cultures.

Hermeneutics versus Philosophy and Natural Science

Hermeneutics, simply put, is of interpretations. It has “grosso modo,” the character of revealing, if unveiling, phenomenal happenstances where an explanatory relevance is scarcely forthcoming. Even though authors²¹ claim that hermeneutics is akin to the exegetical²² processes of Biblical interpretation, one can talk about it and even use it in a variety of issues in general knowledge that make use of interpretative and explanatory processes in their study analysis. I have suggested elsewhere, while giving a descriptive definition²³ of hermeneutics, that “hermeneutics concerns interpretation. It is also of the meaning of meaning itself. Hermeneutics enlists the services of explanation with the aim of shading sufficient light on the significance of a word or a proposition.”²⁴

The imports of hermeneutics operate with the purpose of clarification of words, concepts and or assertions for purposes of theoretical explanation that help praxis in study, research and, possibly, experiment. This may be the reason why M. Inwood prefers to refer to hermeneutics as meaning “expression,” “explanation,” “translation,” or “interpretation.”²⁵ Following from this etymological excurses of hermeneutics, Obi Oguejiofor comments: “Although many thinkers add different slants to the meaning of the term, in general, hermeneutics involves bringing an inner meaning into the open. It entails making explicit what is implicit. It is thus a quest for meaning, one’s own meaning in one’s universe, which could be said to be constituted by one’s cultural symbols.”²⁶

²⁰ See B.O. Eboh, “Feminism and African Cultural Heritage,” *Journal of Inculturation Theology* 5, no. 2 (2003), pp. 130-313.

²¹ See T.I. Okere, *African Philosophy*, pp. 15 ff.

²² See E.E. Ekweke, “Can There be an African Philosophy of Science?,” p. 207.

²³ See *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²⁴ E.E. Ekweke, “Can There be an African Philosophy of Science?,” p. 197.

²⁵ M. Inwood, “Hermeneutics,” quoted in J.O. Oguejiofor, “Negritude as Hermeneutics,” p. 80.

²⁶ J.O. Oguejiofor, “Negritude as Hermeneutics,” p. 80.

The person's universe could be obscure at times. Even one's own environment, more often than one could imagine, could be weird. The strangeness of one's universe, one's environment, one's natural surrounding is, in most parts, made familiar thanks to hermeneutics. And there are as much hermeneutic as there are levels and aspects of learning. In our context, for instance, we are interested in a hermeneutics of culture in the service of interculture. We expect a hermeneutics of philosophy in an African context. And we want natural science to be analyzed in philosophy through the hermeneutical parcoure. What all these mean is that in any of the above mentioned disciplines or aspects of learning, men seek to understand their ultimate realities. Our argument is that such an exercise becomes positively facile if we choose the hermeneutic way. Understanding is as important as it is eclectic in all epistemic processes in macrocosmic knowledge. Even given particular traditions that scarcely do break away from a universal appeal to culture, the phenomenon of understanding still has a pride of place. In this context of tradition,²⁷ the activity of understanding appeals to the relevance of the past and the present by way of putting them together in one philosophy of time. This is important both in hermeneutics and in philosophy. The imports of this operate in favour of both the Particular and the Universal. In the philosophically universal, hermeneutics, through the phenomenon of understanding, clarifies the weird ultimacy of things in themselves, searching for their roots and accompanying their activities in the world around, us in order to clarify the obscurity of their being for the purpose of understanding. While doing this, time and place are considered. It is at this juncture that particular thinking in the sense of philosophy comes in. And, once again, in particular space and in particular time, the roles of tradition, culture, interculture, become very important. And hermeneutics is operative in all these.

In the same vein, hermeneutics interacts with science in the sense of interculture. But first of all, the characteristics of natural science, breeds enough methodic ground to involve hermeneutics in its scheme. Like I have said elsewhere:

Science itself is a discipline that is widely acclaimed as being methodically adequate especially when it has to

²⁷ See *Ibid.*, p. 82.

do with the empirically observational. A referential approach to the word science would concern the functioning of the society where an ordered approach to operations is implicated. In this case, science is used in the sense of the scientific that means order, study or procedure towards achieving a set goal...science... reveals hidden nature.²⁸

This reveals a characteristic of science as being empirical, that means observationally adequate. It thrives in methods, uses explanation while seeking to understand the hidden crannies of nature. And, like we have insinuated earlier in this work, method, explanation and understanding are necessarily party to the underpinning ingredients of hermeneutics. In line with our thinking, also, hermeneutics operates, and could operate, in an empirically scientific happenstance. This is a context in learning where an intercultural scientific process could and does enlist the services of hermeneutics for worthwhile clarifications of contextual knowledge.

The Imports of Cultural Hermeneutics as Working in the Service of Science, Philosophy and Interculture

A hermeneutics of culture would also serve in the further aspect of intercultural. A situation arises where a given culture has problems associating with or encountering another culture. Hermeneutics, with its characteristic of making clear what is not yet explained,²⁹ would be of immense help. This is why I have recommended that in some aspects of intercultural relationships like philosophy and natural science, hermeneutics be applied. Through this, cultures would understand themselves for worthwhile intercultural relationships. Fritjof Capra may not be a professional or conscious hermeneut, but he has spent time exploring the parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism.³⁰ Little did he know that his

²⁸ E.E. Ekweke, "Can There be an African Philosophy of Science?," p. 199.

²⁹ See J.O. Oguejiofor, "Negritude as Hermeneutics," pp. 80-82.

³⁰ Fritjof Capra is a modern American physicist of repute. He has unassumingly discovered similarities between modern physics and Eastern mysticism. This is, in our context, an example of a concrete and positive intercultural relationship with particular reference to natural scientific culture

exercise is largely hermeneutical. In his epoch-making text, he says succinctly: "The Eastern optics have a dynamic view of the universe similar to that of modern physics, and consequently it is not surprising that they, too, have used the image of the dance to convey their intuition of nature."³¹ This characterization is an impression of a western physicist who appreciates another culture for not just natural science but general knowledge. He succeeds in this positive appraisal because he has made bold to study this so-called Eastern mysticism. We can then notice the good influence of the characteristics of hermeneutics in Capra's characterization. Capra's is a subjective exercise, since he is probably alone in the work he has done. One could say that it is even individualistic. But there is a situation where one or two other persons from the culture of the individual observer have made similar observations. At this juncture, what is observed by the first observer becomes inter-subjective since another individual subjective approach is involved. This kind of inter-subjectivity breeds a given objectivity that is explanatorily powerful to effect a given epistemic plausibility. Alexandra Neel has made a journey to Tibet. She describes how she met a Lama who introduced himself as "a master of sound."³² He then gave Neel the following statement of his view of the matter: "All things are aggregations of atoms that dance and by their movements produce sounds. While the rhythm of the dance changes, the sound it produces also changes...Each atom perpetually sings its song, and the sound, at every moment, creates dance and subtle forms."³³

It is amazing to note how strikingly similar the above view is to modern physics. Sound, as we know, is a wave with a certain frequency. This changes when the sound does. Particles are the modern equivalents of the old concept of atom. And they are also waves with frequencies proportional to their energies. Capra, in this vein, with reference to Neel's report, opines that: "According to field theory, each particle does indeed 'perpetually sing its song',

and ethical culture. See F. Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (London: Flamingo, 1992), p. 269.

³¹ F. Capra, *The Tao of Physics*.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 269.

³³ Alexandra David-Neel, *Tibetan Journey* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1936), pp. 186-187.

producing rhythmic patterns of energy (the virtual particles) in 'dense and subtle forms.'"³⁴

Our representation above of two cultures in both natural science and "natural" mysticism, as I call It, reveal beautiful, logical and positive imports of intercultural which have hermeneutic undertones. The western culture of natural science meets with, and acknowledges, the importance of the Eastern culture as exemplified in its mysticism. In the bid to do this, the two cultures discover the similarities repository in the "I" and in the "Thou" of the unique meeting. This is a hermeneutic intercultural positivity that explores the beauty of two particularities and respective contexts that have proved the eclectic characteristic of intercultural where two cultures encounter themselves in a universal sameness of purpose. And this is epistemic enough to promote general knowledge.

Implications for Africa in a Global World

We have been discussing, in divers ways, culture, Interculture, Science and philosophy claiming to do all these through hermeneutics. What is, however, important at this point of our writing is how this implicates and or concerns Africa. Owing to the insurgencies³⁵ of the world beyond the African confines, aspects of knowledge, as in philosophy and natural science, have known chequered mutational developments. In philosophy, for instance, we are still at sea over what should be regarded as African philosophy, which should be a matter of contextual consensus. Our philosophy in Africa is what we call it. It is a thinking that is supposed to be African of Africans.

In recent times, some African professional philosophers³⁶ have individually, and or in groups, renewed worries, through criticisms about what should be African Philosophy, or at least part of what should be African philosophy. For instance, renewed criticism abound against such currents as "Ethno philosophy" with its root in Tempels' *La Philosophie Bantou*, Negritude of the thoughts of Senghor, Ujamaa of the philosophical legacy of Nyerere, Nkrumah's conscientism and other philosophical ideologies put forward by African born philosophers and or intellectuals. Instead of these

³⁴ F. Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, p. 269.

³⁵ See E.E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, pp. 22-24.

³⁶ See D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, pp. 124 ff.

criticisms, we could do our philosophical enterprise through a given philosophical ideology so that our intercultural relation between the African and the other be methodic, operating with some logic called African. This is the reason why this paper is suggesting the hermeneutic way that is both universal and particular.

It is against this background that Theophilus Okere, since 1970, has suggested the hermeneutic style of doing philosophy, while criticizing ethno-philosophy as expressed by Temples, Kagama and Mbiti. This, for Okere, is a false route to African Philosophy.³⁷ Other hermeneutists after Okere are Tsenay Serequeberhan, who adds the phenomena of horizon, context and discourse to boost the quiddity of hermeneutics. Tshiamelenga Ntunba and Nkombe Oleka insist on the interpretation of one's cultural symbols while doing philosophy.³⁸ The hermeneutic approach is one that can be fruitful, since it is a philosophy that is culture friendly.

There is also the phenomenon of African science. When one says this, critics jump on the very mention of it. As I said of philosophical and other thinking, our contact with the outside world has made the growth of our science and technology very slow. Yes, it is not only myth and magic, as presented in the issue of witchcraft of the African. In this regard, I have argued:

We should not forget that Africa is today documentarily known as the cradle of all civilizations. These civilizations range from industry to history through science to Technology and culture. In the West African region for instance, some evidence expose some advanced civilization in history and technology. Even people from some Asian and European countries imported materials of advanced technology from Africa, including the area Nigeria now occupies. Spectacular developments were noticed culturally and historically in such areas in Nigeria and West Africa like Ife, the Northern part of Ghana, Bankori, in the South of Mali and the Niger Delta areas between Benin and the Cameroons.³⁹ There are also many areas especially in some parts of the Igbo area of South Eastern Nigeria

³⁷ J.O. Oguejiofor, "Negritude as Hermeneutics. A Reinterpretation of Leopold Sedar Senghor's Philosophy," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2009), p. 83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁹ E.E. Ekweke, "Can There Be an African Philosophy of Science?," p. 201.

where the technology of iron smelting was very evident in around the 10th century.⁴⁰

Thus, even in the area of natural science and technology, the African is not barren, the African has a lot to offer. The question is the how of it. Once again, the hermeneutic culture can help us sell our ingenuity to the world around us and beyond our frontiers. We can achieve an intercultural exercise with the world, and impart peace and responsible partnership to those who used it to rape our integrity and distort the cocoon of our developmental innocence. We have been practicing intercultural in the area of science to the benefit of the "other." As Eboh rightly posits: "Today in our societies, we are putting into use the various products of scientific culture created elsewhere. We use for our benefits things like automobile, electricity, telephone, western education etc....these foreign 'Cultures' are now being used by us to control time, energy, space and advance our wellbeing beyond our natural condition."⁴¹

Eboh's appreciation of a contemporary example of scientific activity is enough to make us think. The African has to go back to the drawing table. He should rediscover his naturally scientific past and exploit it in order to encounter the other globally. Our view is that when we do good hermeneutics in our natural scientific culture, we shall be ready to export a scientific culture truly natural of science and truly cultural of Africa.

Conclusion

At the dawn of the last decade of the last century, Kwame Anthony Appiah, the wise man of "Mbrom," a small neighbourhood in Kumasi, reserved the pleasures of interviewing Chinua Achebe, the foremost literary giant of Igboland. The subject was Africa, pure and simple. Part of the Fruits of this encounter has been put down by Appiah in this way:

It is, of course, true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African. But at the same time, there is an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and certain meaning. Because if somebody meets me, say, in a shop in

⁴⁰ See M. Nwachukwu, in *Ahijoku Lectures*, 2003, p. 9.

⁴¹ B.O. Eboh, "Feminism and African Cultural Heritage," p. 131.

Cambridge [England], he says “Are you from Africa?” which means that Africa means something to some people. Each of these tags has a meaning, and...a responsibility. I think it is part of the writers’ role to encourage the creation of an African identity.⁴²

I may not be in full support of Achebe’s characterization of the fate of the African identity as presented by Appiah. But I agree that the African identity, far from its being just created, should be clarified and explained to the stranger who encounters Africa, especially interculturally. For this to be possible, we reiterate our suggestion in this paper that the hermeneutic approach to learning, philosophy and natural science may not be conclusive. But we can lay hands on it as a help in a given theory of “Trial and Error”⁴³ of the order of Popper’s philosophy of natural science. This trial may convince us. The African identity is a myth of some uniqueness. This is the reason why we Africans have to clarify this myth to the world of intercultural polity, where we Africans should be party to the ongoing global resort to contributions for a new world of knowledge about the globe. Thus far, Africans have been sturdy in their literary analysis of their problems. But, a more interpretative line of thought is required. Paulin J. Hountondji, some decades ago, made allusion to this truism as he says:

It is not enough to recognize the existence of an African Philosophical literature. The most important task is to transform it from the simple collection of writings aimed at non – African readers and consequently upholding the peculiarities of a so-called African “world view” that is today into the vehicle of a free and rigorous discussion among African philosophers themselves. Only then will this literature acquire universal value and enrich the common international heritage of human thought.⁴⁴

⁴² K.A. Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 73-74.

⁴³ See K.R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, pp. 58 ff.

⁴⁴ P.J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy. Myth and Reality* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 69-70.

The argument that we advanced in this paper points a given authenticity that should come from African thinkers who want to be party to the global appeal to contemporary issues.

Finally, we have come far in our thinking by discussing parts of the African *problematique* through a reflection on interculture. We have allowed this intellectual artifact to mix with a hermeneutics of purpose. This purpose has enlisted the services of culture, philosophy and aspects of natural science for a concrete intellectual outing. While not being overly contextual of Africa, we have made bold to be wary of the Universal components of our discussion, where the indices involved have been proved sufficiently eclectic. The Universalist components embedded in our discussion have stood our account that is African in both theoretical and practical good stead.

We beg to conclude by saying that "Africa has experienced a myriad of paradigms that strike historical changes and happenstances that stock at the fabrics of what could be said to be the history of her crises. Be this as it may, some causes of the said crises could have come from outside of our frontiers. But we want to quickly add that blaming our current situation of crises and its contextual status quo on moribund causes from the outside of our confines is scarcely adequate. Rather we should look inward and heal our problems from their roots."⁴⁵ "Yes we can!"⁴⁶

⁴⁵ E.E. Ekweke, "Editor's Note," *Oche-Amamihe Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 2, no. 1, p. viii.

⁴⁶ B.A. Obama, a worthy son of Africa, born and bred in the United States of America, has this phrase credited to him. Two of his books, *inter alia*, *Dream from my Father* and *Audacity of Hope* have helped his guts to achieve the American Presidency. He spoke to Africa in Ghana, 2009. Let his audacity illumine the African hope, if not dream.

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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

Purpose

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

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A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and

look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues*. This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

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