



Studying African Philosophy, Learning Metaphysical Culturalism

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Abstract

The relevance of African Philosophy is being questioned with the rising imposition of its will and necessity by the dominating culture of science and technology in our contemporary time. The questions whether African Philosophy exists or not, are no longer asked, because it has already been established within and beyond the culture which it belongs, but the propensity of its relevance, especially when it is viewed to be very abstractive and metaphysical in nature and in consideration. This philosophical altercation is on the recent pavilion of pedagogical discursive relevance. It is on the question whether some elements or realities in African Philosophy are teachable or not. The paper recognised that there is always methodology associated with any mode of learning, even in primitive African societies. This paper examines the societal consideration of the proper teaching and studying of African Philosophy, even when it does not necessarily have to follow the scientific model of learning and deriving facts. In this, it is considered as "Metaphysical Culturalism" which is also teachable as other philosophical cultures do.

Introduction

For many scholars, to attain meaningful and qualitative continental development, there is always the indispensable need to study and utilise the continental philosophy associated with such society, and this is realistically posited when such continental thinkers enhance the thought patterns, ideologies, values, interests, socialization of their peoples through proper educational engagements. The primary problem of all philosophies is the problem of the most general characters of experience and of reflection. For no object matter of knowledge can escape the necessity of being given in individual experience and no theory can escape the necessity of being the product of

logical reflection (See, Znaneicki 1919, 24 in Anyanwu 1983, 35). The designated consideration of African philosophy is about the initiation for the understanding of the African peoples. It is about the African reflection, inward consideration and development. It is about their cultures, their development and growth, and their general thought patterns. This has been the fostered interest on which some of the African thinkers and even some non-African thinkers, within and outside, based their philosophical engagements, especially on the quest to liberate Africa and her peoples from the shackles of non-recognition in the past.

The act or process of understanding is about the valuing of things or events. It is not simply about the accumulation of facts about the world or the possession of knowledge about things. It is about the penetration of appearances to apprehend the essence of things (Oladipo 2008). The understanding of African philosophy is also about the liberation of the black race from the enslaved cultures of the Western world that had regarded her as the unreflective domain of humankind. It shows the level of alienation and abandonment of the black race by western cultures which believes that the former does not have the capacity of rationalising meaningful opinions and policies from their own thinking nature. It is about the conception of realities in African ways. What exactly are the concepts we think about as Africans in our ways and convictions? The conviction of the Africans is on the strength of their culture, and they have metaphysical importance and relevance for the growth of African philosophical development. In the words of Marrah (2010);

In conducting their historical essay, African philosophers want to rectify the historical prejudices of negation, indifference, severance, and oblivion that have plagued African philosophy in the hands of European devil's advocates and their African accomplices. African historical investigations in philosophy go beyond defence, confrontations, and corrections. They are also authentic projects and exercises in genuine scientific construction of African philosophy concerning diverse matters of its identity and difference, problem and project, its objectives, discoveries, development, achievements and defects or failures (p. 7).

Since there is no dissociation of sensibilities in African culture, African social theory has theology as its model; and this is why we say that the core of African culture is religion.

But in a dissociated culture, social theory has nothing to do with theology and, in fact, social theory has replaced theology (Anyanwu 1983, 28). African Philosophy is thus about the redefinition of the affirmation and the certainty of the African culture and her situations. It is about the African people proffering solutions to their problems by themselves, not necessarily relying on the western thinkers for such ventures, and it is style in itself. Perhaps the distinctiveness of African Philosophy could come out of a greater sense of the unity of man as a whole self, of man with his fellowman and of man with nature and God (Ruch 1974, 14). It is about the African perspective of natural arrangement of event and the understanding of whole affairs of the human person. According to Udoh, Mbuk and Ejiogu (2008);

In our African conception, the human person is primarily constituted of his very essence (absolute constitution) as an end-in himself and also as related to others (relational constitution) which makes him the central focus of all actions and development, ... who underlines a third element, the transcendental which facilitates his communion with creator (p. 1).

The central point of African philosophical reflection and adventure is on a concrete reality which is man himself and everything about him. Explaining the African Mystical Society, in an attempt to bring the understanding of the metaphysical analysis of the concept of reincarnation to the fore, Echekwube (2002) says; the African conceives of the human society as composed of both the departed ancestors who are physically represented by the elders, the living and surviving members of the family and children yet unborn. The fact the spirit of the dead influences the behaviour of the living and the children yet unborn are seriously considered of the society has informed the use of the expression (p.28). Also, for Oraegbunam (2007);

Philosophy is founded on reality and for reality, and some of its postulations can be tested on reality. And the bases on which the African Philosophy is on the constitution of development and growth of African way of living and cultural intonations for liberation and self-reliance(p. 11).

More importantly, it is based on the proximity of cultural or continental philosophy on which this essay insists that African Philosophy should be taught on proper method to its origin and purposes of postulations. Hence, this essay is about the understanding of method for studying and teaching of African Philosophy in attempts to exhume the real philosophical thoughts of traditional African philosophers. In the course of time the questions of the existence of African Philosophy have been asked, and some answers of authenticity of its existence and originality have been proffered. There is no culture without limitations, even Africa, as Shakur (2007) says that the complex problems facing developing countries have often been attributed to the tendency of their people to maintain traditional beliefs and practices. Many contemporary philosophers have criticized traditional thought for failing to match the levels of efficiency and effectiveness achieved by modern science.

However, other contemporary philosophers have suggested that modern science embodies tendencies that are as likely to exacerbate or relieve the problems of the developing world. As philosophical culture is reflective, and the reflective characters of philosophical enquiry which includes: phenomenological, speculative, analytical, prescriptive, rational, critical and descriptive, are also evident in African Philosophy(See, Oduor 2010). I conclude that philosophers must be as wary of modern practices and beliefs as they are of traditional practices and beliefs. Modernity rather than tradition is undoubtedly a principal source of Africa's

problems. One of these answers is that of Ruch(1974) that;

There is, of course, no effect without a proportionate cause. If there is an African Philosophy, some people had to create it. If nobody has created it, then it does not exist. But the fact that we do not know the names of the peoples of the past that have shaped the thinking patterns and the belief of the African people does not matter, for one thing, even in the West we do not always know the precise wording of the ideas of certain, even important, philosophers(p. 9).

More straightforwardly, it would be ascertained that whether modern or traditional assessment of African philosophy, the principal source of meaning of African philosophy remains its metaphysical evaluation of realities is situated within the pavilion of proper philosophical classification. This paper tries to ascertain that the classification should be to pedagogically evaluate and develop African philosophy towards the courses of contemporary human development. So, let us see how the understanding of the acquisition of African Philosophy as metaphysical culturalism is possible.

The Question of Teaching and Studying of African Philosophy

Pedagogy is about the methodological teaching and learning of reality or event within thrust of a discipline. Teaching and learning are tools of education. Studying necessarily involves learning, and visa-vis. Education also involves the training of individuals in order to acquire a particular skill or skills and also the formation and development of moral character and mental power. The whole aspect of education is centred towards the formation of the human person in order to make such person or persons capable of utilizing their entire resources for the good of the society to

which they belong (Owoseni 2011). Through learning and studying, knowledge is acquired or obtained. They are necessarily involving methodologies and skills, that is, the processes are systematised. Learning and studying are at the heart of education. The questions about whether there is African Philosophy or not, are no longer the pressing issues at the moment. Many thinkers, even outside the shore of Africa, have agreed that there is African Philosophy, on the basis that every human race is a product of a particular culture which is necessarily not devoid of philosophies. The question now is whether one can teach or study the elements or objects of interests in African philosophy, is the visibly debating discourse.

Conventionally, the classroom is a place or an avenue where formal teaching (on the part of teacher or instructor) and formal studying (on the part of the learners as students), take place, and there are necessary conditions which are demanded on normal circumstance, that will necessarily propelled or guaranteed good teaching and learning processes. One of such conditions is about having good communication situation amongst students and also with their teacher(s). Sometimes, this condition is distorted and hindered by noise and other associated factors which cause communication problems in classroom. Despite these limitations, teaching and studying are possible for all known disciplines, but may not perfectly adequate. Then, if this is possible for these disciplines, it is equally possible to teach and learn African Philosophy, even in the face of imposition of superiority which modern sciences are trying to present, in attempt to discard all metaphysical elements in human learning processes, which African Philosophy mostly pitch its tents. Hence, Tempels(1949) will say that

It is crime against education to impose on a human race a civilisation devoid of philosophy. It would be an even more serious crime to deprive a people of its own

patrimony, of a heritage which alone can ensure its full human quality, of the only good which can serve as the starting point for a cultural development(p. 141).

Tempels, as a social anthropologist, viewed African Philosophy as a “Spontaneous Philosophy”. The question now is about whether it can be learnt and taught or not. But, the thought about its existence indicates the on-going process of its acquisition and internalisation. One of the pressing issues is that of the method used or should be used in studying and teaching African philosophy. As a discipline or a subject/course of a discipline should not be seen an alien to the already established teaching methods for the impartation of knowledge, because the intelligibility of the human nature is subjected to personal interest toward individual development and growth. The development of the divisions and subdivisions of philosophy does not start with the recognition of African philosophy, as Horton (1977) will say that;

One of the principal tasks of philosophy is to wrestle with the question of how thought and language enable us to get a grip on the world. Now, in recent years, philosophers in Western countries have become increasingly aware of the possibility that there may be no single answer to this question (about the world and man). This awareness has undoubtedly been promoted by the increasingly compartmentalised character of western life, with its high degree of occupational specialisation and the accompanying tendency for different ways of using thought and language to predominate in institutional context. One of such awareness has been the proliferation, alongside the basic discipline of logic and epistemology, of a series of sub-disciplines in which the foci of

enquiry are particular ways of using language in particular institutional contexts. Examples are: philosophy of law, philosophy of morals, philosophy of religion, philosophy of aesthetics, philosophy of history, philosophy of science (p. 69).

This is to say that the issues of imparting the elements of knowledge in African Philosophy; in terms of methodologies, that is meticulous itemisation of elements of knowledge or conviction, should not be seen as problems. That, they are there is the matter should be the matter of consideration, before the issues of methodologies. Hence, Wiredu (2006) asserts that; “

Nevertheless, the starting point of the problem is that the African who has learned philosophy in English, for example, has most likely become conceptually westernized to a large extent not by choice but by the force of historical circumstances. To that same extent he may have become de-Africanized. It does not matter if the philosophy learned was African philosophy. If that philosophy was academically formulated in English and articulated therein, the message was already substantially westernized, unless there was a conscious effort toward cross-cultural filtration. Of course, in colonial times such concerns were not the order of the day, to say the least, nor have they, even now in post-colonial times, acquired that status. This gives the prevailing discussion a special significance; for, as far as I know, it is the first conference on decolonization in African Philosophy.

But, the consideration should be based on the level of the tutors’ awareness of the tenets of African Philosophy, and the level of disposition and interest of learners towards

it. Horton (1977) has this to say about the makeup of African Philosophy, that; “the teacher must be prepared to spend time and trouble coming to term with the traditionalist attitudes and beliefs which his students bring to the classroom or laboratory. He must be prepared to delve beneath the daunting difference between these attitudes and beliefs and his own, in search of shared canons of reasoning and arguments” (p. 72). Every canon of reasoning and argument requires the pedagogical engagement that will necessary brings out the knowledge of the learners. Horton goes further to assert that the teacher “must be prepared to try and argue his students over from their position to his by appealing to these shared canons. In order to work out such an approach, the teachers will need to draw on the same background material as the policy-maker: that is, in searching conceptual analysis of the transition from traditional to scientific modes of thought” (p. 74).

So, in the face of modernity needed for scientific research methodology for it to gain purposefulness in the universal pavilion, especially amongst scientists, requires structured model of explanation that should be cultural and metaphysical based. Nevertheless, it is difficult to gainsay the fact that *research* has something to do with the acquisition or creation of new knowledge through a specific strategy for *investigation*. It is this strategy that we refer to as *methodology* (Oduor 2010). According to Spirkin (1983), a methodology is a system of principles and general ways of organising and structuring theoretical and practical activity, and also the theory of this system. According to the most common classification, there are philosophical, general scientific and special scientific methods.

The Explication of Metaphysical Culturalism as African Philosophy

Everything that is being discussed in Africa philosophy has a very cultural undertone, and been coloured by some elements of religion.

Africans are known to be very religious just because of their deep reverence and worship of some metaphysical elements or realities that are culturally decorated. Culture is a collection of ways of thought, feeling, learned and shared by number of people which serve objectively and symbolically to make them collectively distinct. Hence Ekhosueki (2013) explicates that;

Culture defines the extent to which people are attracted to certain ideas and norms. It emphasises the dynamic nature of culture and stresses the mental character of culture and the manner in which it shapes human perception. Culture is made up of invention and convention, refers to the appropriation of culture by individuals to its on-going development and to what is held in common, which is agreed upon in society respectively.

Defining culture is a product of invention and convention shows the indispensable and resilient and ardent practices of a particular group of people. Culture is a profound philosophy of a particular group of people that distinct them from others. It indicates that modern philosophy must be a philosophy of culture. As long as the world remained meaningful within the applications of philosophy; a world of pure ideas independent of the individual's experience, or a world of pure natural reality independent of reflection, starting with experience or reflection was merely a methodical trick used in order to reach something entirely different (see, Znaneicki, 1919, 24 in Anyanwu, 1983, 35). These and others make the African man obviously difficult to be understood by those who view him with foreign orientations, and likewise his philosophies. They believe that the African man has not properly embraced the trends of modernity and civilisation that are based on objectivity of interests rather than the subjective nature and disposition which they believe are the foundations on which the African man pitched his tent. They

say this on the ground of documentation of thoughts. It is hard to say much about those opinions and discussion in places where they have not been written down.

However, we are able to find some evidence of the character of those views in such areas as part of Sub-Sahara Africa where writing was introduced into oral cultures over the last few centuries. So, African Philosophy has adopted methodologies over a long time, such as questioning or interviewing, writing and documentation, memorisation and the likes. Cultural philosophy demands that we should know the basic assumptions about reality in every culture as well as to fashion the necessary standards in terms of which cultures interpret the facts of experience.

Furthermore, the need for understanding man as a product of culture as well as a meaning-maker is so important today that philosophers cannot afford to dissipate their energy on methodology (See, Anyanwu 1983, 40). In all eras, metaphysical thought is the driving force of civilization. Today, this force is largely unacknowledged. It is unacknowledged because the metaphysical will to development has no place in the paradigms of modern science. Yet all of the values, the aspirations, the ambitions and compulsions powering societies have their basis in unacknowledged metaphysical phenomena underlying human activity (Schain 2002). It is on this consideration that Anyanwu regarded the study of African Philosophy as "Cultural Philosophy" initially but subjectively sectional to the valuation of Western Philosophy (Momoh, 1988). But African Philosophy cannot be without classification, and that is why I classified it as "Metaphysical Culturalism". The tendency to neglect the metaphysical aspect of human life has always existed in the history of mankind but no era has so depreciated and disparaged metaphysics as the current one. Metaphysics is relegated to the realm of scholarly study or traditional religions where it exists in a tethered, tradition-bound form of little use to those seeking to develop their

position in the universe. For example, though it is not peculiar to Africa, but unique to her in consideration and application in advancing the meaningfulness, according to Fisher and Bailey (2000, 327);

Witchcraft is more than a religion and the practice of magic. It is a philosophy, a way of life. Witchcraft offers us a beautiful synthesis of female and male energies. It integrated thought, feelings and intuition and provides a meaningful connection between the material and non-material worlds.

Witchcraft is an element of epistemic tradition, and it constitutes raw materials for rational justification of some African epistemic engagement. The same goes with divination (See, Izibili 2009, 92). Parenthetically, it should be noted that the need for metaphysics is widely utilized by profit-seeking individuals who take advantage of the yearning for something more than the limited materialist approach to life. Some of the elements or factors of *metaphysical culturalism* which I want to associate African philosophy are: witchcraft, omen, sorcery, nightmare, *Parousia* (The End of Time), divination, magic, occultism, and the likes. The logical consideration of African Philosophy as “Metaphysical Culturalism” explicates itself within the domain of human learning that every reality of African philosophical thought and practice can be pedagogically developed to affect human and societal development, meaningfully, just as science in the Western Philosophy.

Socio-Cultural and Scientific Impacts on African Philosophy

The assessment of this work is on the ways to exhume the philosophical thoughts of traditional African philosophers. Contemporary works in African Philosophy are characterized by views concerning either the possibility of African Philosophy or the idea of African philosophy. The former

serves as an answer to Western doubt of the possibility of African philosophy, whereas the latter is about what philosophy is and what should be the preoccupations of African Philosophy (Akpan 2010). The measure of the test of validity of African Philosophy should not be necessarily proven by scientific tools as Western Philosophy suggested in the pavilion of empirical verification. This is because most of the elements of thought, belief and conviction in African Philosophy are metaphysically vested and authenticated, which are virtually very different from the tools of science. African Philosophy is traditional and cultural founded that is wrapped in metaphysical or immaterial connotations of interests.

The facts remain that the metaphysical elements of philosophical tradition can be ascertained, to be considered as knowledge. This is certain the human nature is a composite of body and spirit, physical and metaphysical elements, and almost every reality, if not all, in nature is dualistic. And science is not the ultimate paradigm for the certainty of every knowledge claim in humanity. Ogbenika(2010) says in the introductory note of his book ‘The Idea of Spirit in African Philosophy’ that;

One very important aspect of that reality in African culture is the world of spirits. The African concept of reality influences belief and practices regarding spirits in a peculiar way, quite unlike anything in Western thought. African traditional thought has its own logic for explaining and understanding these apparently unintelligible beliefs and practices.

Thence, Offor(2008); with the consideration of the importance of social sciences for the evaluation of human conduct, criticises the tools of science, that is, the empirical verification exercises for the establishment of knowledge (p. 40). That, we considered the view that the scientific method is not a suitable model for investigating human-

social phenomena on ground of the appreciable difference between the natural and the social science, but rejected such a view as resulting from a narrow conception of the formalist thesis: that every scientific theory, as well as the way it serves the purpose of explanation, must fit into a 'definite logical structure'. Also, Ruch(1974) asserts that

It must look backward into its own tradition and its own history, because it is here that Africa will find its identity.... A world-view does not grow in a vacuum. Whether can it easily be grafted onto a totally foreign culture? One can with relative ease adopt behaviour of a foreign culture. One cannot truly adopt a foreign culture as an adult. Culture is made up of the 'gut issues' in a person's life, of the values of his actions and of the hopes of his future(pp. 14-15).

This complexity of non-agreeable model of measurement and assessment in a universal consideration suggests the unique peculiarity of every model of assessment of thought, whether traditional or scientific, modern or local. However, during the last few centuries of Western intellectual history, the validity of these earlier methods of explanation has been subjected to critical questioning by philosophers. The need to square up with these criticisms resulted in a shift in the method of explanation from the 'theological' through the 'metaphysical' to the scientific (Offor 2008, 32), but this shift does not give credence of superiority of it over others. In a nutshell, the history of human development is replete with examples of attempt made by man to achieve some understanding of the occurrences in the world around him (Hempel 1966, 7). Every discipline has basic of departure and points of objective to achieve. African Philosophy is not exclusive. Horton (1977) says that "the teaching of philosophy of traditional thought as African Philosophy in Philosophy Department of African universities is not only vital to

further understanding of certain aspects of the here-and-how of the African scene" (p. 74). It is also one means whereby members of African philosophical departments can make their own distinctive contribution to certain universally significant philosophical issues.

Evaluative Conclusion

From the foregoing, the question of African Philosophical tradition must be determined in line in which British philosophy, for example, is seen as empiricism. Then; it has been evaluated that the American as pragmatism, French as rationalism, German as idealism, Russian as materialism, Indian as spiritualism and Chinese as humanism. A tradition of Philosophy is identifiable in terms of the innermost essence of the intellectual pulse within which it is produced(See, Azenabor 2011, 271). So African is not an exception, as it is situated in a peculiar context which is naturally cultural, and it can be referred to, regarded or classified as "Metaphysical Culturalism" which is also teachable as other cultures do. And it is also very much analysable. According to Unah (1995);

The African who comes in contact with an object of knowledge not only sees the object but also imagines a life-force interacting with another life-force. In other words, the African who wants to come to knowledge of the world makes use of concepts of inspection, intuition and imagination. He neither logically analyses these concepts nor carries out a rigorous empirical study of the epistemic object. This is because he neither doubts the evidence of his senses in the Cartesian fashion nor does he dispute his intuitive experience. He lives in a cultural environment of great art, synthesis and aesthetic continuum in which every vital experience has to be lived, felt, imagined and sympathised with(p. 107).

It should be agreed that contemporary African scholars with any shred of philosophical learning can claim to be philosophers and the teachers of philosophy, especially their own traditional thoughts and beliefs, whether physical or metaphysical, mundane or modern. They should be confident in this pedagogical engagement after all they have been so certified by the Western intellectual tradition (see, Momoh 1988, 36). Philosophy and development should make clearer a way to understand and approximate the definition of concrete life and society (Iroegbu 2005, 135). Then, if other thoughts are teachable, this can. Teaching and studying are processes in/on which knowledge is acquired. The question of their method should be asked on the level of which the knowledge acquired. If Philosophy or/and any of its subdivisions should be considered as a good success, irrespective the method used.

African Philosophy should not be seen as different or obscure, if the thoughts of other cultures and people outside/beside could be understood and advanced upon. African Philosophy could be understood or is understood by thinkers especially from African origin. African Philosophy has element of unique interests. African philosophy as *metaphysical culturalism* embraces all tools of philosophy. This means, the consideration of it as *metaphysical culturalism* is also analytical if one can demonstrate these elements of beliefs in African philosophy to learners. Such element like witchcraft could be demonstrated, because it is also very practical and empirical. This brings to the consideration that African philosophers should adequately studied and practically internalised these elements of philosophising in African Philosophy, in able to convene these beliefs to learners. With this background, one will suggest the demonstration skill in learning and studying African Philosophy.

More straightforwardly, in attempt to achieving these, in line with this classification or consideration of African Philosophy as *Metaphysical Culturalism*, as Odour recommended earlier; African philosophers must diligently work for the preservation of the distinct character of philosophy as a discipline. To do this, they will have to move away from the debate on the existence and nature of African philosophy, and focus their efforts on the quest for a criterion by which to distinguish philosophical works from non-philosophical ones, regardless of where the works hail from (Oduor 2010). It is about expressing our cultural heritages and conviction which we have considered to be our philosophies to be scientific. As a result, discussion of African philosophy should include both material on some oral cultures and rather more on the philosophical work that has been done in literate traditions on the African continent include those that have developed since the introduction of Western philosophical training there (Appiah 1998). One can also learn a great deal by looking more generally at ethical and aesthetic thought, since in all parts of the continent, philosophical issues concerning evaluation were discussed and views developed before writing, and it is in this way that African Philosophy was view. Those who criticise it condemned it before studying it, on which no studying is done without methodology.

In all, for the study of African Philosophy to be more meaningful and expressively scientific, as a condition to learn and exhibit the metaphysically-oriented nature of its culture, on which every of its philosophical assertion is seated, the following claims should be considered:

- i. That the African philosophers should academically engage themselves in expressing of African metaphysical heritages and practices inherent in African cultures and development, such as, sorcery, witchcraft and divinations, more convincingly. This is about; bring

what appear to be very metaphysically and abstractly difficult to explain; on how these realities or ways of living work, then making them practically and epistemologically assimilated, exhibited, situated and fashioned before and by the students of African Philosophy (see, Isanbor 2015^a and 2016). Considering African Philosophy as Metaphysical Culturalism is an academic movement, trying to fashion African Philosophy as a scientific enterprise. It is so doing, that we make African philosophy scientific, by living out with all conviction, what we profess practically (see, Isanbor 2015^b).

- ii. Beside the works of professional African philosophers, the major sources of African Philosophy have been African proverbs, myths, songs, folk tales, names, artefacts, languages, symbols, historical

experiences, traditional prayers (see, Kanu 2015, 59-76, Ogbenika 2016), which are ontologically and culturally fashioned on the nature of their worldviews and religious convictions. From which, many doctrines emanated, such as immortality, personal destiny, predestination, universals, personal identity, cultural determinism, Afterlife, nothingness, African time, space, causation, witchcraft, spirits, soul, death, kingship, God, Religion, faith, morality, communality, fate. That, the students of African philosophy should be directed on the modalities to learn the meanings, components and workability of these culturally-oriented concepts and realities, within clear-cut philosophical involvements of their professors of African Philosophy

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