

## AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY IN AND BEYOND ETHNOPHILOSOPHY

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### **Abstract**

*The most basic and fundamental appreciation of the disciplinary nomenclature African Philosophy is deeply rooted in the genuine conceptualization of itself as Philosophy rather than mere Ethnophilosophy (Cultural Philosophy or Sage Philosophy). African Philosophy, therefore, is Philosophy in and beyond Ethnophilosophy and the likes with regard to its valid meaning, authentic source, proper understanding and authentic application. Albeit, the emergence of Contemporary and vibrant African Philosophers in the chequered history of Philosophy allows for a rigorous but coordinated attention to this age long problem on the proper meaning and place of African Philosophy as Philosophy qua tale in the World philosophical circle.. Using the method of hermeneutics, the paper shows that African Philosophy like other philosophies from many philosophical traditions within the world philosophical heritage has a resourceful origin sprouting from the background of an African Weltanschauung that is from ethno-philosophical foundations as they equally had their sources from their worldview. Theophilus Okere very foremost in this orientation refers to such philosophical materials as philosophemes which is the philosophical deposits and layers of traditional or indigenous systems of critical thoughts and culture in the nascent stage of philosophy unto contemporary history of philosophy often misinterpreted as cosmological studies seeking for the Urstuff. Africa Philosophy is therefore philosophy in its Africanity and Philosophicality.*

**Keywords:** African Philosophy, Philosophy, Ethnophilosophy, *philosophemes*

### **Introduction:**

Philosophy is traditionally understood as *philosophia* and it is classically defined as *cognitio rerum per altissimas causas, solar rationis*, that is, science that studies all things in their ultimate and universal principles. Equally, it is *scientia rerum per ultima causas*, that is, knowledge of things through their ultimate causes. It is, therefore, a human enterprise. This is why *philosophia* is transliterated love (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*). As a human enterprise, at any point man seeks to know with an unaided reasoning and understands effectively the reason and wisdom behind every reality, philosophy is involved and at play. Philosophy is an attempt at personal comprehension, trying to fathom out or give meaning to

one's own environment. As Okere, T. (1983, 114) will say: "Philosophy is an effort at self understanding, a giving of meaning to one's own world and existence. It is always "my" philosophy - in other words, a first-person effort". Hence, Maritain (2005, 72) maintains that Philosophy is the highest of human sciences, that is, of the sciences which knows things by the natural light of reason. As a human enterprise, neither discipline nor culture, neither science nor arts and every form of development, humanities and society is devoid of philosophical influence and critical attention. Therefore, every aspect of human engagement and interaction become the *repertoire* and great source of philosophical inquiry. That is to say, every form of critical appreciation and noteworthy investigation relate to the well being of man. Hence, Philosophy starts with the reality of our human understanding of our immediate environment, then, unto and beyond as it continues to influence human kind as *homo interlocutor*.

### **Development of Philosophy in History and Practise**

Historical excursus across different philosophical traditions, through philosophical branches and other applied areas of philosophical discourse portrays Philosophy as *mater scientia*, that is mother of sciences, properly understood as mother of systematic or scientific knowledge. Influenced by many religious innuendoes of the Western philosophical traditions and Christ's influence on the great philosophers of the medieval period, philosophy was regarded as *ancilla theologiae*, the handmaid of theology, of which Maritain (2005, 72) regards Theology as the only science above philosophy since it is a science of God. Obenga Theophile (1992, 51) reiterates on this issue thus:

Philosophy has nourished science. It precedes the science. Science (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Political Science, Aesthetics, Logic, Biology, Sociology, etc) was born of Philosophy

In the long taught ancient history of philosophy, the Milesians or pre-Socratics reckoned as first philosophers were more of cosmologists and whose philosophy was regarded as *hylozoist* because it ascribed life to matter. Their critical thinking bordered on the basic stuff or the *urstuff* of reality of which they proffered materialistic or elemental responses like: water (Thales), air (Anaximenes), fire (Heraclitus) and indeterminate or boundless (Anaximander) etc. However, despite the elemental differences in identifying the *urstuff* of reality, Kaufman et al (2003, 1) observes that:

There is this kind of continuity, a continuing focus: the human attempt to understand the world, using human reason. These facts distinguish these philosophers from the great minds that preceded them.

These Greeks, the pre-Socratics, the elemental thinkers amidst the *historico-hierarchy* of philosophers were nevertheless regarded as members of the family of the ancient philosophers. Most of these pre-Socratics used mythological stories of the gods and cosmological explanations of realities to explain the operations of the world and self. In doing so, most of these Greeks began to discover new ways of explaining things and rediscovering realities as such. Continuing on this idea, however, Kaufmann (2003, 1-2) reiterates thus:

This, after all, is how Western philosophy did begin, and we can still recapture something of the excitement of this new way of thinking as we move from the bald statements of Thales to the all-embracing questions of Socrates, and thence to Plato's efforts to fuse criticism with construction.

One must, however, accept that the pre-Socratic influence was great on the later budding philosophers like Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, the Eleatics (Parmenides, Zeno of Elea and Melissus), the Pluralists (Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus and Leucippus), the Sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias and Critias), Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hellenistic and Roman philosophy. Kaufmann (2003, 3) endorsed these facts thus:

The pre-Socratics' influence on Plato was so great that a study of their thoughts is essential to understanding many passages in his dialogue and his intentions; many problems were suggested to him by Heraclitus, the Eleatics, and the Pythagoreans- and, of course, by his originality Aristotle studied the pre-Socratics closely and discussed them at length in the first book of his *Metaphysics* (reprinted in this volume). Of the later Greek philosophers, it has often been remarked that the Stoics were particularly influenced by Heraclitus and the Epicureans by Democritus. Elements of Orphism, an early Greek religious movement, also found their way into the ideas of the Pre-Socratics-most obviously, but by no means only, into Pythagoreanism- and hence into Plato and later, into

Christianity. In fact, a few of these fragments survived only as quotations in the work of early Christian writers.

The fact is clear. Philosophical enterprise, being a human project, is a search that starts with one's immediate environmental realities. That is to say, philosophy begins with clarity of thought, with whatever one's environment presents for proper comprehensible appreciation and suitable comprehensive application. Pre-Socratics had this critical venture and were regarded as such and of course were never branded otherwise, neither was their philosophic enterprise denied existence nor possibility as African, once faced and continues to face. As long as philosophy is a human enterprise with an unaided reasoning, it continues to evolve with man's cultural renewal and adaptations, general consciousness of realities and genuine human authentic development.

There is, therefore, an enduring significance of those elemental thinkers of the ancient time unto what philosophy is all about today. This is what one may refer to as an enduring influence of the socio-cultural realities or the perennial influence of traditional existentialities of critical issues on philosophy. Tallis, R. (2007, ix) following this trend of thought remarked thus of Parmenides as the greatest of all Greek philosophers with the words:

While he is generally acknowledged as the father of reason-based thought of Western Europe, it is evident that he was possessed by an unreasonable passion for truth, and the conclusions to which reason led him were a profound affront to the common sense that is the product of the accumulated practical reason of human kind.

Philosophy as a human engagement grows along human kind, and firstly, his *tangible facts of existential realities*. Beside this entire gamut of human experience, philosophy develops and is developed. This is why an applied philosophy like Philosophy of Development or Philosophy of Sciences as well as Environmental Philosophy thrives today in our contemporary era. Okere, T. (1983, 7) reiterates thus:

Philosophy on the other hand is essentially an individual enterprise and is often *mise-en-cause*, a radical questioning of the collective image. By reflection and the questioning of this image, one makes an individual an effort to find, that is, to give a meaning to one's world.

A cursory look at middle age or medieval and modern philosophical orientations show according to Kaufmann (2003, xi), “a time of intellectual sterility ...as a valley between two great mountain ranges-Greek philosophy on one side , which medievalism distorted and Modern philosophy on the other”. Most of their philosophical thoughts were of a *sacramentalized* view of God with great figures like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and William Ockham with great thoughts on politics and ethics bordering more on metaphysics and epistemology. However, within the epoch of medieval era which was greatly informed by ancient thinkers, one can see that critical abstract thought has started crystallizing in philosophy as such.

The era of modern philosophy was greeted and expended with flourishing philosophical enterprise that is more universal than particular, with an individualistic opinion than popular or general view. These were as a result of the reformation movement and renaissance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So to say, the environmental problems informed by the religiously bent philosophy of medieval period contributed greatly in shaping this modern era. To this end, one might try to conclude that philosophizing is a continuum in the search for wisdom to be loved incarnated in daily living and environmental realities of daily human existential experience otherwise referred as *tangible facts of existential realities*.

In western periodization of philosophy, the current era or contemporary philosophy began with the philosophy of late 19<sup>th</sup> century until 21<sup>st</sup> century and has a lot of present-day issues to deal with. It gives room to the idea of continental philosophy with great bent on analysis of language that philosophy engages in its critical discussions or breakdown of verbal communication to discover inner thoughts of the speaker. This form of crucial study or significant scrutiny of language, leading to analytic philosophy with prominent philosophers was Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Immanuel Kant and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

The issue at hand was heavily on contemporaneity as against the ancient era of philosophy. There was a return to the ancient understanding against the misinterpretation of *Being-question* of which Martin Heidegger (1990, 21) accused all philosophers before him of questionable deviation from the search for *urstuff* of reality, which is the forgetfulness of being, hence recommends a philosophical return to *Fundamental Ontology* which according to Onebunne, J. (2019a, 33) is

“the investigation of *Dasein*, Human Being, who posits the question of being, the ancient question of the reality of the constituents of things”. However, Iroegbu, P. (1995, 213) refer and exalts this Heideggerian ingenuity of ontological difference-which is the soil or foundation of being, across the history of philosophy that starting with Pre-Socratic’s elemental postulates through Plato’s ideals and Aristotelian *Ousia* unto Thomistic Onto-theological realism leading to Cartesian solipsistic *cogito*. Philosophical search moved on through Hume’s metaphysical nihilism and Kant’s transcendental apperception unto Hegel’s absolute spirit manifestation. Heidegger in his new critical appreciation rejected Leibniz subjectivity, Spinoza’s monadology as well as the *Urbmensch* (Superman) of Nietzsche. This *ontological difference* in question nevertheless survived Ayer’s logical positivism and Whitehead’s process reality as well as Sartre’s existentialism. These philosophers and their philosophical trends were attempts at articulating particularly the human problems with regard to appreciating the basic stuff of reality amidst realities. Their philosophical submissions were greatly influenced by the trend of things in their own time and environment. Of course, they cannot think their thoughts outside their milieu.

### **Revisiting the Debate on the Existence of African Philosophy**

According to Iroegbu, P., (1994, 129), “no author has to my knowledge declared that there can be no African Philosophy”. The problem has been in Iroegbu’s perspective thus: *is the bulk of material called African philosophy by their authors, readers or researchers genuinely philosophy and genuinely African philosophy?* Amidst all the tradition-based narratives of in the texts of P. Tempels, A. Kagame, and J. Mbiti as well as the political thoughts of S. Senghor, K. Nkrumah, J. Nyerere, N. Azikiwe really philosophic in a sense or mere collection of stories. However, no serious mind will doubt the philosophical dexterity and critical status of authors and scholars like Paulin Hountondji, Theophilus Okere, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, Odera Oruka and Panteleon Iroegbu to mention but a few.

Okere argues on the conditional possibility of African philosophy with his *philosophemes*. Wiredu, having contrasted the traditional thought patterns with the already existing Western philosophical texts branded the much lauded African philosophy Folk philosophy. Bodunrin sees in the Bantu philosophy (Tempels and Kagame) and Mbiti’s work a mere justification of belief system devoid of philosophical rigour. Oruka was apt in distinguishing and grading philosophical works or rightly put, works on *African Thoughts* done before him thus: *ethno-philosophy, philosophical sagacity, nationalist ideological philosophy and professional philosophy* - of which Hountondji, Bodunri and Wiredu’s work

excelled as professional philosophy and others were collection of worldviews. In line with the above, one can conclude with Hountondji that African philosophy is still before us, not behind us. That is, it is yet to come according to Wiredu and Bodunri, and Okere was very sure that they can be African philosophy given the needed hermeneutics of culture, as there exists a reservoir of cultural *philosophemes* in Africa. Other later contemporary philosophers like K. Gyekye, H. Maurier, K.C. Anyanwu, C. Onyewuenyi, C.B. Okolo, P. Iroegbu, and I.M. Osuagwu readily accept there is African Philosophy as philosophy as such. The criteria for African philosophy and being an African Philosopher however should not be limited to authorship irrespective of continental boundaries like Hountondji and some philosophers may argue. Omeregbe, J. in Bodunrin (1985, 5), was very succinct in declaring that, “when there is reflection on the fundamental questions about man or about the universe (whatever form this reflection may take) there is philosophy”.

Hence, with the foregoing, contemporary philosophy saw great rise in African philosophical enterprise, within and without. Acknowledging this sublime fact, Oguejiofor, J.O. (2003) submits to the envisaged problem thus, “although African philosophy has become a part of the world philosophical heritage that can no longer be neglected, no comprehensive history of it is available”. His problematic possibility, however, was that of methodological moments for African philosophy rather than a challenged impossibility. The implication of Oguejiofor’s bold statement is that there is a philosophy that is African or in Africa to be historically articulated and pieced together. If there is no philosophy, there will be no need for its history as such and at all. The existence of a philosophy necessitates a history. Oguejiofor was very particular with regard to the prospect and possibility of articulating the history of African Philosophy of which Osuagwu, I.M., amidst other astute authors has done great scholarly job with the following titles: *A Contemporary History of African Philosophy, Amamihe Lecture Series, Vol. IV*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.), 1999; *African Historical Reconstruction*, (Owerri: Assumpta Press Ltd.), 1999 and *Early Medieval History of African Philosophy, Amamihe Lectures, Vol.II* (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 2001).

The main critical question with regard to African Philosophy that has come to stay, like Chinese or Jewish Philosophy, borders more on the existing doubt over the origin of philosophy in ancient Greeks against the afrocentric view that philosophy started in Ancient Egypt of African as the cradle of civilization. Many scholarships have attested to this fact thus: Nwala’s *Igbo Philosophy*, Onyewuenyi’s *African Origin of Greek Philosophy*, Obenga’s *African Philosophy: The*

Pharaonic Period, 2780-330BC, Okafor's *Igbo Philosophy of Law*, Hountondji's *African Philosophy, Myth and Reality*, to mention but a few. Amidst these African scholarships with regard to origin and proper history of African philosophy, how can one continue to question the possibility of African philosophy and worst still, how can one still regard African philosophy which has become a part of world philosophical heritage and has informed philosophers of the ancient era of the Western philosophical tradition a mere ethno-philosophy in a derogatory sense, that is a cultural assemblage of beliefs, patches of wisdom and systems of thought. Can such reductionism be related to Muslim philosophy or Indian philosophy? In this forthright line of thought one tries to critically appreciate Pantaleon Iroegbu's effort in positing from pure African background and precisely from Igbo worldview the concept of *Uwa* Ontology as the African comprehensive metaphysics of being.

### **Understanding of Ethno-philosophy**

Ethno-philosophy is neither a branch of philosophy nor an applied philosophy of any philosophical tradition but rather a derogatory aspect in the understanding of one particular philosophical tradition or philosophy that is Africa by origin, praxis and practice. Many African scholars opined that the term ethno-philosophy was first used by Kwame Nkrumah having been coined by Pauline Houtondji who viewed it as a combination of ethnography and philosophy. By various African historical methodologies of (deconstruction, deduction, construction and reconstruction), the basic problems and project of authentic African philosophy like every other philosophical tradition is assured and guaranteed. In favour of much opposition against African philosophy, Onyewueyi, I.C. (1993, 2) writes: "the history of Africa, as presented by European Scholars has been encumbered with malicious myths". Osuagwu, I.M. (2010, 28) reiterates thus: "the major argument is that Africans lack the natural faculty and cultural capacity of reason, and so could not have formally philosophized or historicized". Ethno-philosophy defined as such is philosophy that is based on the works of ethnographers, sociologists and anthropologists, interpreting our African world views as well as our myths and folklores as constituting part of African philosophy. Ethno-philosophy is a critical study against the age long bias that Africans lacked culture and history and are illiterates. Ethno-philosophy therefore should *study any and every indigenous philosophical system*.

In spite of outstanding vagaries of criticisms, ethno-philosophy etymologically is from *ethnos* and *philosophia*. Hence, it is the *philosophy* of the *ethnos*. It is *ethnos philosophy*. The Greek word *ethnos* means a multitude or a nation with a



prevailing opinion for human beings. For Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the Greek word *Ethnos* means nation, people, caste, tribe, and is akin to Greek *Ethos* meaning custom. This is why Kwasi Wiredu in Oguejiofor, J.O (2001: 90) defined African philosophy as “the philosophy of the people is always a traditional spoke of the interconnection that must exist between the vital elements of that tradition”. Philosophy as love of wisdom does not just happen or falls from the blues but as a human enterprise, it engages one with his socio-cultural milieu alongside other realities confronting his existence as *homo sapiens* as well as *homo loquens*, and more, as *homo cogitans* and *animal culturalis*. Man’s interaction within his immediate environment demands a response that is reasonable and lasting. The environment presents enough issues to be dealt with and in doing so, man defines himself suitable for the environment. This act of definition entails a kind of reflective response. It is a kind of critical response-ability and significant responsibility from within one’s background.

Ethno-philosophy, therefore, is the tribal, communal response, cultural view or customary critical view of a people. Every philosophy, right from the dawn of the history of philosophy, be it of the Ancient period of Western philosophical tradition or the Ancient period of African philosophical tradition, emanates from the peoples’ appreciation of environmental realities around them. Whatever is around a people becomes the primary source of their critical views and appreciation. Philosophy as the critical worldview of the people or *ethnos*, remains according to Okere, T (1983:18) the hermeneutics of culture. The Cambridge English Dictionary states that culture is “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.” To philosophize, therefore, is to interpret the way of life of the people embedded in their belief system and customs. Philosophy, therefore, is interpretation of culture. It is a clarification and explanation of the way and life of a people. As a human enterprise, philosophy elucidates on the realities confronting the human society as well as his environment. Within the culture of the people as *Ethnos*, exists raw philosophical materials for critical engagement which Okere Theophilus refers as *Philosophemes*. However, Onebunne, J. (2019a, 22) asserts thus: “*Philosophemes* is a concept used by Theophilus Okere which represents those cultural materials, data or givens that we use in philosophizing. It is the cultural and natural realities which are veritable products for philosophical enterprise”. According to Okere, T. (1983, 120):

we assert, however, that in black African there exists a reservoir of cultural *philosophemes* from which any future philosopher can inspire himself or borrow his share of philosophical raw material.

In such a culture a philosopher can plant his root and from inside it, and as forming part of it, develop a philosophy with his culture as non- philosophical background.

Ethno-philosophy to this extent cuts across every known philosophical traditions of the globe. However, derogatory regards and disparaging comments on ethno-philosophy is an unfair appreciation of the Africa's indigenous contribution *via* their cultural heritage with significant consequences into the mainstream philosophy. Houndtonji, P. unfortunately was among the foremost African philosophers who painfully had a very strong *via negative approach* and rigid opinion of African philosophy as if to say he was wrongly informed by some Western philosophers that saw nothing good in Africa as a continent save the rooting of African continent *via* colonialism, as a result of the failure and abolition of the inhuman slave trade and recently the African debt to the West. Hountondji not only labelled ethno-philosophy like Bantu philosophy as myth, with arbitrary interpretations and no texts. According to Wiredu, K. (2004:1), "Hountondji has along with some Francophone African philosophers, used the word ethnophilosophy as a kind of negative characterization of what I have called here the traditionalist approach to African philosophy". Wiredu, however, maintains a *possible* position for African philosophy. Hountondji regrettably concludes that Bantu philosophy and the likes are myths that have to be definitively destroyed if real philosophy can ever take root in Africa. The pertinent question is: from where then should African Philosophy take root and be sourced apart from African literary issues and non-philosophical issues in relation to a people's cultural insinuations and worldview? This is an overstatement especially in this contemporary era if one begins to recount great contributions from African continent and by Africans beginning with Ancient Egypt of Black Pharaoh's era as well as other philosophical-literary works by many historical figures of repute on philosophy in Africa. However, one can really think of later Hountondji and his later criteria for African philosophy. Hence, Hountondji (1996, 106) opined that "we Africans can probably today recover philosophical fragments from oral literature". He, however, continues to shift positive ground towards the acknowledgement of the existence of a holistic African philosophy beyond fragments. However, Hountondji's in line with this recent move has another work on African philosophy as Critical Universalism. Nevertheless, in recognition of such great contributions even to Christianity by Africans, Pope John-Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia In Africa* writes:

We think of the Christian Churches of Africa whose origins go back to the times of the Apostles and are traditionally associated with the name and teaching of Mark the Evangelist. We think of their countless Saints, Martyrs, Confessors, and Virgins, and recall the fact that from the second to the fourth century's Christian life in the North of Africa was most vigorous and had a leading place in theological study and literary production. The names of the great doctors and writers come to mind, men like Origen, Saint Athanasius, and Saint Cyril, leaders of the Alexandrian school, and at the other end of the North African coastline, Tertullian, Saint Cyprian and above all Saint Augustine, one of the most brilliant lights of the Christian world.

However, some of the European philosophers of the Western philosophical tradition like John Locke, David Hume, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Hegel and Heidegger to mention but a few though uniformly and ignorantly claimed, as Osuagwu, I. M. (2010, 28) in line with the foregoing denial captured it thus: "African philosophy never existed formally, neither as a science nor as a history". Nevertheless, the existence of great scholarship in contemporary era and even then in Ancient period would have informed them otherwise. To this end, Obenga, T., in his landmark research, published *La Philosophie Africaine de la periode Pharaonique 2780-330 avant notre ere (African Philosophy of the Pharaonic era 2780-330BC)*. Continuing, Obenga, T. (1990, 1) confirms that the Ancient Greek philosophers having studied in Africa of the Pharaonic era went back to Athens to philosophize. This perhaps prompted George G.M. James to reiterate further in his best selling but thought provoking title: *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*. This scholarship continued with another mind blowing caption by Onyewuenyi, I.C. thus: *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentricism*. Beyond references made to the contemporary African Philosophy, the referred authors and scholarships above showed the existence of critical views and thorough dealings of Africans with regard to the realities around them. Such views portray a form of African philosophy right from the dawn of philosophy as a human enterprise. Oguejiofor, J.O. (2001, 90) rhetorically affirms thus that "it brings into question what one makes of Egyptian philosophy that Aristotle made reference to in his book of Metaphysics, and which has been the subject of a spate of researches by scholars recently".

It is a great miscarriage of justice to Africa and her philosophy and a glaring show of ignorance of these existing scholarships as well as philosophical figures like St. Augustine, Tertullian, Lactantius, Clement of Alexandria, Ethiopian

philosophy as documented by Claude Sumner and yet African philosophy is still regarded as a mere ethno-philosophy. However, a proper definition of ethno-philosophy will be within the limits and bounds of *ethnos* informing the philosophy of a particular people for the world philosophic heritage. Such a definition is inherent in Okere's historic-hermeneutical investigation of the conditions for the possibility of African philosophy. Philosophers like Placid Tempels delved into *Bantu Philosophy* to discover the notion of *force* rather than *being* as the pervading idea, or at least, the existence of a traditional philosophy. Okere, T. (1983, 6) showed that Kagame in line with Tempels related the language system of Rwandan/Ruandan people to philosophy. All these were against the view of African philosophy as the primitive mentality by Levy Bruhl.

### Proper Understanding of African Philosophy

African philosophy is philosophy as it is done in and for Africa and others. It is a philosophical tradition that is African within the mainstream of philosophy as a systematic study. African philosophy is the critical and universalizing interpretation of the culture and the worldview of African people by philosophers within and outside African continent. It is philosophy done within African philosophical tradition designating the corpus of African philosophical writings. However, African philosophy like other philosophical traditions has an historical development along the path of human consciousness, critically encountering their realities.

This is against some philosophers' views and philosophical currents trying to demean and oppose the existence of African philosophy. African philosophy, therefore, is a systematic study within the limits of the *Africanity* of philosophy and *philosophicality* of African realities and heritage.

### The *Philosophicality* and *Africanity* of African Philosophy

Osuagwu, I. M (1999, 28) in his criteria for the scientific philosophicality and scientific Africanity of African Philosophy was apt to note thus:

African philosophy is at the same time African and philosophical. In and by these terms, we are searching, on the one hand, for the genuine philosophicality, i.e., formal scientific philosophy, of the said African enterprise, and on the other hand, for the authentic scientific Africanity of that scientific philosophy. These two basic scientific criteria make African philosophy to bear the characteristics marks of its particularity and universality.

Philosophicality simply places African Philosophy at par with *philosophia*, which is love of wisdom. To this extent, African philosophy remains part of the *world philosophical heritage* with one philosophical monoculture though from African *weltannchaunnng*. Philosophicality nevertheless prunes African philosophy of the old socio-cultural bias of existence, and mere sceptical influence with pseudo-philosophical orientation. However, by this singular application of philosophicality, African philosophy is philosophy *qua* philosophy irrespective of the philosophical traditions and or philosophers' postulations as long as it expresses the needed *love for wisdom* and maintains the search for knowledge with an unaided reason as the most basic instrument. African Philosophy in this perspective is philosophy *per excellence* considering its contribution to world philosophical heritage and even to Western ancient philosophers like Socrates and other known philosophical figures, periodisation and traditions. If Socrates was regarded as a philosopher per se alongside Western philosophical tradition, then the tradition that produced him, which is the Egyptian African philosophical tradition must have elements of such uncompromising philosophical innuendoes. Onebunne, J. I. (2019a, 20) summarily opined thus:

*Philosophicality* is another principal criterion for determining African metaphysics. African philosophy is at the same time African, philosophical and metaphysical. By these terms, we are searching for the genuine understanding of philosophy. *Philosophicality*, as a basic scientific criterion makes African philosophy to bear the characteristic mark of its universality. Hence, echoing Osuagwu, I.M., therefore, in line with this understanding, African philosophy is, therefore, a universalization, a universal vocation, ordination, destination and determination of and in the African particular. To this extent African philosophy or metaphysics is carried on at the same time according to philosophy's general scientific norms, exigencies and African particular, traditional and natural factors.

African philosophy has been very much neglected, rejected and denied on the purported grounds of its lack of genuine *scientificity*, authentic *Africanity* and systematic *philosophicality*. Through continued studies and sustained researches, African philosophy finds stability with its *Africanity* and more by its *philosophicality*. It is no more a question of, *Is there an African philosophy? Can there be African metaphysics?* Today, the emphasis of the question shifts rather from *can there be African philosophy* to the issues of the *possibility* and contemporaneously

African philosophy is dealing with facts of historicity and method in African philosophy, principles, issues and special areas in African philosophy and her branches.

Equally, the *Africanity* of African philosophy worths the salt. Scientific *Africanity* is a complementary principle in the definition of African philosophy. *Africanity* is a criterion that defines African philosophy properly with some parameters. According to Osuagwu, I.M. (2001, 24): “by its *africanity*, it is a particular, that is to say, a particular reflection, concentration, concretization, contextualization, experience, identification and differentiation of the philosophic, scientific universal”. *Africanity* tries to solve the controversy and the project of African philosophy by going beyond the boundaries of the geographical Africa. Within the geographical context, *Africanity* expresses what it takes for any philosophy to be qualified, identified, and differentiated as specifically and typically African. It contextualizes African experiences, life and reality within the realm of philosophy. For Osuagwu, I. M. (2001, 26) therefore:

Scientific *Africanity* refers to a set of African parameters or factors which include nature and culture, persons, places, times, events, doctrine, text and methods involved in philosophic enterprises so designated. These factors and many more constitute the common requirements by which a given subject matter is said to be African.

Borrowing an impressive idea from J. Kinyongo, Osuagwu, I. M. (1999, 28) writes that “African philosophy is carried on at the same time according to philosophy’s general scientific exigencies and Africa’s particular natural and cultural factors. In this cooperation, and mutual integration, philosophy and *Africanity* look into each other to detect, engage and determine the scientifically valid and available in themselves”.

### Definitional Universality of African Philosophy

The definition and universality of African Philosophy against oddities of credibility and doubts of existence per chance is resolved in the *philosophicality* and *Africanity* of African Philosophy. African philosophy therefore, has a share in the mainstream of philosophical traditions growing as a human enterprise as a result of critical interpretation of tradition and cultural realities. Okere, T. (1983, 38) asserts that “all philosophy is essentially an historical and time bound interpretation of being”. In this line of thought, however, there are ethno-philosophical foundations to philosophy as critical engagement and

philosophical traditions of which African philosophy or Chinese philosophy is no exception. This is far beyond referring African philosophy as *Sage* or mere *Cultural* philosophy. Amidst all sorts of bizarre and false ideas on the capability of African man to philosophize, questioning the depth of their philosophy, one can boast of African philosophical scholarship as well as African authorship. However, Iroegbu (1994, 116) an optimistic contemporary philosopher was very apt in defining African philosophy as:

The reflective inquiry into the marvels and problematics that confront one in African world, in view of producing systematic explanation and sustained responses to them. It is an inquiry with two aspects: *philosophical* and *African*.

Iroegbu, P. was very *premier* in giving this succinct definition. In this definition one can read a *kind* defense of African philosophy against being labeled mere folk, cultural or *ethno*-philosophy. The background at the time of this definition has to do with questioning and giving the possibility of African philosophy with regard to historicity and methodology. This is why for Iroegbu, P., African philosophy *is a philo-sophia, a quest for African wisdom*. However, Iroegbu was academically astute enough to reiterate that “African philosophy is philosophy done in an African context...the different aspects and complexities of existence that challenge him as an African person. In this respect, every philosophy is contextual philosophy”. By this very act, I strongly add that every philosophy to worth the salt is ethno-philosophical, relatively cultural and appropriately traditional to the philosopher. Alluding to this Iroegbu (1994, 122) was vehemently bent on this general understanding of philosophy as: the global participation of all realities and entities in the general fact and understanding of being as being whether in African, Asian or Western Philosophy. Summarily, Iroegbu (1994, 122) gave ten areas of any contextual or ethno-philosophical basic foundation for genuine philosophical enterprise thus: *Geo-environmental, Socio-cultural, Episteme, Mythico-religious, political-moral, Historic, Ethnic -linguistic, Existential, Phenomenologico-pragmatical and ontological*. For Iroegbu, P, therefore, these philosophical concepts alone “are what we generally call the African philosophical *philosophemes*: raw materials for philosophical reflection, questioning, responses, analysis and eventual synthesis”. In this statement of fact, Iroegbu, P. continue to echo his teacher Okere Theophilus who had earlier conceived the idea of *philosophemes* as deposit of conceptual data or realities for philosophical enterprise. In favour of African philosophy, Okere Theophilus (1983, 70) was first in positing the possibility when he opined thus:

If philosophy is to be auto-generated from a culture, if it is to represent an articulated self-expression of man within his culture, one has to look for a different metacategory, more pertinent to Igbo culture than Being. Perhaps the notion of life, perhaps even the Igbo conception of “Uwa” (literally the world, but really englobing both the cosmos, nature, and destiny), could take over the role of Being. This need not imply that an Igbo cannot understand the notion of Being or a philosophy based on this notion. It means, however, that a philosophy original to this culture would not take its orientation from a concept so strange to it.

### Ethno-philosophical Foundations of African Philosophy

Philosophy like African Philosophy has been rooted in the culture and worldview of the people. These socio-cultural data and worldviews of people’s realities remain *the given* for critical appraisal in the quest or search for knowledge or wisdom which is philosophy. This is philosophizing *per se*. Okere, T. (1983, 15) opined strongly for the possibility of African philosophy based on this opinion thus: “It is only within the context of hermeneutics that African culture can give birth to African philosophy”. Why then do some philosophers refuse to accept and acknowledge that African culture has been reflected on and interpreted as such over the century amidst great scholarship and authorship even as its methodological moments and scientific historicity are readily available? To this extent, any reference to African philosophy as mere derogatory ethno-philosophy than its foundation or fundamental root is a mark of great lack of scholarly ingenuity and serious disfavor to knowledge. Instead, one is inclined to accept that African philosophy, being part of world philosophical heritage, has an ethno-philosophical foundation. Bodunrin, P.O. (1985, 1) in furtherance of this interpretation asserts that:

Philosophy is essentially a reflective activity. To Philosophize is to reflect on human experience in search of answers to some fundamental questions. As man takes a reflective at himself or the world around him, he is filled with wonder and some fundamental questions arise in his mind.

Hence, when Ethno-philosophy is made reference to, one is simply philosophizing and reflecting on the realities around him. As philosophy of the



*Ethnos*, that is the culture or the people, philosophy is wondering on the reality and the worldview of the people in question Omoregbe (1985) asserts that “human experience is the source of the reflective activity known as philosophy”. It is by this singular human exercise of interpreting realities and reflecting on the peoples’ worldview and symbolic cultures that one attains the level of wondering for the love of wisdom which is *philosophia*. Hence Paul Riceouer (in Okere: 1983, 18) asserts: “One can philosophize from culture, or at least from those elements of culture that can be called symbols”. Okere (1983: 18) buttressing further remarks: “symbols are pregnant with meaning ...philosophical discourse is, therefore, a hermeneutical development of the symbols, these enigmas which precede and nourish it”. Therefore, having *Ethnos* as the basics or the foundation of philosophical excursus is very proper. Summarily Okere (1983, 120) writes:

We assert, however, that in black Africa there exists a reservoir of cultural *philosophemenes* from which any future philosopher can inspire himself or borrow his share of philosophical raw material. In such a culture a philosopher can plant his roots and from inside it, and as forming part of it, develop a philosophy with his culture as non-philosophical background.

Onebunne, J. (2019a, 23) rightly affirms that many African literatures gave credence to Okere’s work on African Philosophy as an *avant guard* in the application of hermeneutics of culture as philosophizing per excellence. Okere (1983, i) asserts greatly of the possibility African philosophy and its ultimate source thus:

The ongoing artistic and intellectual renaissance in Black Africa includes the search for an African Philosophy. But designating what is African Philosophy needs some criteria. Philosophy is a unique cultural form and, despite affinities, is not to be confused with other forms such as myth, *Weltanschauung* and religion. But it grows out of a cultural background and depends on it.

Iroegbu’s philosophy especially his *Uwa* Ontology is a product of critical cultural symbolism; that is a kind of reflection on the symbols of his culture, *amidst implications it embodies*. Philosophy *ipso facto*, as a human enterprise is a reflection on symbols which are pregnant with sense and meaning. However, the unique relationship of culture to philosophy is explained in the natural constitution of man as *animal culturalis* and *homo cogitans*. African cultures being symbolically

structured are laden with vital and significant meaning. Hence, a critical reflection on these symbols trying to make the inherent and underlying meanings open and explicit would give credence to what constitutes African philosophy.

Therefore, a definitive thoughtful interpretation and critical analysis of the symbols of African cultures would be African philosophy *qua tale*. That is to say, Igbo philosophy would nevertheless consist in the interpretation at a certain level of the various symbols and institutions or traditions of Igbo culture. The concept of *Uwa* for instance, stands both for everything that is as well *being* in Igbo philosophy, all those institutions and symbols in Igbo world that is ever pregnant with sense and meaning. Therefore, a reflection with profound application of criticality, analyticity and originality on African thoughts and culture give credence to philosophy and rightly put, African Philosophy. Such profundity in the critical appreciation of African or Igbo worldview make of them, veritable moments for African or Igbo philosophy based on categories native to Igbo culture and proper to its *symbolismic* universe. With the methodological moment of proper hermeneutics, one can dependably and realistically infer that an African philosophy is a philosophy with African source and nourished from African culture as its cultural reservoir and primary critical nourishment. Okere, T. (1983, 17) was the *primus inter pares* in asserting authoritatively that culture is the foundation of Philosophy by hermeneutically engaging Paul Ricoeur extensively on the existing relationship between culture and philosophy thus:

It is by interpreting the symbols of a culture that one can arrive at reflexion, philosophy. Ricoeur defines reflexion as the connection between the comprehension of signs or symbols and self-comprehension. Reflexion is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be across the works which bear witness to this effort and this desire. It is the incorporating of our new understanding of our culture into our own self-understanding. After these preliminary definitions, here is how the author conceives his strategy. In a methodical process from culture to philosophy, the movement from symbols to reflective thought, Ricoeur proposes three stages, or levels of interpretation: the phenomenological stage...the hermeneutical stage... and the reflexive stage...Thus for Ricoeur, one can philosophise from culture, or at least from those elements of culture that can be called symbols. "Le symbole donne a penser," the author loves to say. Symbols are pregnant with

meaning. It is not entirely the thinker who gives all the meaning as a spider might spin out its webs from its own bowels. The symbol provides the basis of meaning. Thought has only to elaborate what is already given. *In the symbol all has already been said in enigma, but nevertheless, one has to develop it on the level of reflexion.* Every symbol is an objectivation of life and thus already an expression of meaning. This meaning has to be elaborated by reason. The richness of meaning is already there, pre-existing the clear philosophical elaboration. Philosophical discourse is, therefore, a hermeneutical development of the symbols, these enigmas which precede and nourish it. There is no symbol which cannot become reflexion or comprehension through an interpretation.

## Conclusion

Philosophy with many philosophical traditions remains a *lively* human enterprise that studies any and every other thing. African Philosophy which enjoys African philosophical tradition therefore is a philosophical reflection which is a process of uncovering interpretatively the grandeur of African cultural symbols and natural heritage. This is the thrust of *ethno-philosophy*. This is the basis of ethno-philosophical foundations of African philosophy. Therefore, African Philosophy is in Ethnophilosophy by all ramifications but it is not Ethnophilosophy in a mere derogatory sense, because it is bigger than mere cultural philosophy or sage utterances. Rather African Philosophy has Ethnophilosophical foundations and nevertheless goes beyond Ethnophilosophy to the level of Philosophy as philosophy.

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