

ETHNO-PHILOSOPHY: CLAIMS, LOGIC AND FACTS

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Abstract

Over time, philosophy is understood as characterized by systematic and critical reflection; an individual enterprise that involves the use of the intellect to assess the realities of the times that often derive from people's culture. Ethno-philosophy is a strand of the philosophic enterprise with geographical locus in that it has a real relation to ethnic people or tribal communities. Ethno-philosophy looks inward into the culture of the people in its endeavour to formulate themes for philosophical development. Ethno-philosophy is thus characterized by its elemental cultural contents. The question to ask whenever ethno-philosophy emerges in a discourse is if it is valid philosophy without curious and questionable acceptance by scholars. Does ethno-philosophy dwarf the universal character of philosophy? This work delves into the problem of ethno-philosophy to proffer deep insight and clear the hurdles on the way to its full appreciation by scholars. The research takes a stand in asserting that ethno-philosophy is indeed valid philosophy. It strives assiduously to amass reasons why for this position. Unfortunately, the denial of validity to ethno-philosophy comes from a wrongly formulated premise. The denial stands on the illogical; and, it can only be justice that the illogicality be exposed for what it is. The paper goes on to show that although thematic development in the strand is fundamentally ethnic, the fruits of the discourse have no reason to so remain. Ethno-philosophy can thus only enrich global philosophy from an amalgam of contributions that reflect the different cultural identities or pluralities that give meaning to the existence of diverse peoples from their geo-local world of being.

Keywords: Ethnophilosophy, Africa, Logic

Introduction

Ethno-philosophy is a recent emergence in African philosophy – a coinage of Nkrumah and a popularization of Hountondji, (Oraegbunam, 2008, p. 78). Ethno-philosophy is a philosophy of cultural appreciation. As a strand in African philosophy, ethno-philosophy finds justification for philosophical interventionism in African cultural realities. Ethno-

philosophy does project African culture both to Africans and the global larger space through systematic reflection on salient cultural issues. Despite the above remarks, it has to be underscored that ethno-philosophy has had to deal with, and still does to a reasonable extent, the inherent problem of its validity. Like any new development; ethno-philosophy *ab initio* met with intellectual resistance in the philosophical world (Asiegbu & Agbakoba, 2008, p. 13). Ethno-philosophy, in another perspective, has defined the right path of philosophizing in the view of some scholars, such as Oraegbunam, who have put in a lot to sustain the emerging tradition (Asiegbu & Gbakoba, 2008, p. 14). The end of the present project is to sift facts from fallacies in the light of logical consistency regarding ethno-philosophy. The work aims also to put paid the misunderstanding that the trend has occasioned in the world of philosophy. The work is informed by the need to accurately inform concerning ethno-philosophy. Ethno-philosophy, in its aspects, is a foundationalist project in that there is a need to lay the proper foundation for a strand of African philosophy through the ethno-philosophic specs since it claims to take African philosophy to its cultural origination. The effort was rigorously deployed to demonstrate that ethno-philosophy meets the criteriological requirements for the affirmation of its validity as philosophy. The immense benefits of the appreciation of the fact and logic of its validity are clearly highlighted in this respect.

Ethno-philosophy is supposedly associated with ethnography or ethnology; the ethno-prefix in each case has to do with 'ethnic', 'ethnicity' and the values that pertain therein. An ethnic people is a community conscious of their ancestral ties; features of which have gone into consideration in the earlier construction and moulding of the community. Traditional communities tend to exist and operate along ethnic orientation in which case the members lay claim to unique characteristics and value heritage. The reality of ethnicity involves parameters for self-identity which stands it as a distinct entity concerning others. Therefore, an ethnic group is a circumscribed entity that cherishes all that goes into its making as separate from any other groups it may decide to refer to or relate to; which, the latter, indeed would adduce reasons to correspondingly cherish theirs. Ethnicity has a real relation to the tribe. Obviously, in this case, language becomes a common binding factor. The linguistic phenomenon of the tribe or ethnic group, in one sense, serves as the window through which it sees and relates with the world both in its micro-self understanding and the interpretation of the macro-world outside of its immediate environment. Values are transmitted via functional modal communications, which in the case of the ethnic people is primarily via the native language, mother tongue or vernacular. Ethnic linguism is fundamental to the description of ethnic people and an inherent socio-structural component of the group. It is a dynamic and progressive vehicle

that keeps alive and continually enriches all that is dear to the people even as it enables further the exploration of the wider world of other peoples outside of itself.

A people conscious of their selfhood operates a world view. This is the totality of their understanding of the world – their world. It is their existential vision of the cultural space in which they find themselves. It also represents their universe of meaning for without meaning life runs into a complex that needs demystification and simplification. It filters reality for the people as the truth that the human spirit yearns for. If this is true, then the ethnic people or tribal communities are culture centred. An ethnic or tribal community cannot be understood except in the context of its cultural world. This is the totalization of what they stand for; what makes them and out of which they add values to themselves and the society at large. Culture is anchored on language. A person in full possession of her language has a firm grip on her culture. Culture thus thrives where the language of the people is healthy and flourishing. It needs to be emphasized however that language is part and parcel of the people's culture.

If the above is true, then it follows that ethno-philosophy is premised on the fundamentals of the people's culture (Njoku, 2002, p. 11). This however, is the micro-picturesque context; the mega-context has to do with the appreciation that culture remains the common denominator, the foundation so to say, in the socio-scientific investigations involving ethnology, ethnography and ethno-philosophy. If ethnological and ethnographic studies have in contemporary times coalesced into cultural anthropological studies, then it entails that cultural reality underlies any investigations about cultural anthropology and ethno-philosophy.

Africa is a culturally conscious continent and pristine African communities know cultural immersion since existentially their life revolves around their cultural world. There is no doubt that with the appreciation of philosophical development in the continent, a reflective engagement that takes into account values inherent in the culture of the people would be naturally a rich source of rational investigation. At least a strand of African philosophy would have to focus on culture as its reflective anchor. The issue of interest is to what extent the outcome of this reflection would qualify as a philosophy or merit acceptance in the pool of global philosophical heritage. Would such an intellectual product not lean heavily on cultural anthropology? Can it justify its extrication from anthropology and thereby emerge as a pure philosophical enterprise? Would such an endeavor be seen as substantially cultural anthropology with accidental pretensions to philosophy? Critics have labelled ethno-philosophy 'descriptive anthropology', with a focus on traditional beliefs (Njoku, 2002, p. 13). In which way can it escape these

accusations? How do we work ethno-philosophy into deserving mainstream global acceptance as philosophy? Philosophy has a universal characterization which ethno-philosophy should not be made to diminish – according to Hountondji (Nnoruka, 2006, p. 46). We intend to examine the views of scholars with regard to the above charges and do the necessary critical review so that the true position would stand out concerning ethno-philosophy. Efforts would be made in the follow-up to this introductory note, to do justice to the issues raised above whereby ethno-philosophy would be seen as what it is – a strand of African philosophy that ought not to be distorted and harangued by the above issues; hence indeed deserves all the recognition accordable to any strand of philosophy strictly speaking.

Ethno-philosophy: An inquiry into the meaning

Philosophy is the systematic reflection on issues generally; the questioning of ‘fundamental aspects of our existence and our experience’ (Magee, p. 7). It needs to be added that this systematic reflection must have to be critical. The critical input is a factor in the essentialization of the philosophic enterprise (Okolo, 1993, p. 3). Ethno-philosophy would thus refer to the systematic and critical reflection on issues that concern a people circumscribed by their self-consciousness – the awareness of such group that they enjoy a recognizable or reckonable identity status that sums up the characteristics that make them up. Ethno-philosophy is a philosophy with a specific focus. The focus is the group that it intends to highlight to wade into its cosmos – in the bid to understudy its realities and proffer something new – knowledge-wise, and especially in terms of proffering solutions to their problems. Since here we are dealing with geographical circumscription and other such identity factors, ethno-philosophy could as well be said to be tribal, regional, communitarian or social. It is in this unique presentation that one can view ethno-philosophy as positively socio-cultural, yet intrinsically problematic. It is this socio-cultural or even anthropological bearing that creates fissures or dislocations in its tendencies and essentially philosophical nature. This could pass for the paradox of ethno-philosophy, namely that its social-unit focus of identity tends to turn around and erode its philosophical nature thereby constituting an intricate web of perception problematic – the nature of ethno-philosophy thus metamorphoses into a complex of meaning that needs to be untwined and clarified.

The essential feature of ethno-philosophy is its communitarian base. Ethno-philosophy is of the people – perceived and argued, to be not of the person conscious of his or her individual identity or individuality. Ethno-philosophy ‘suffocates’, the individual, ‘whose identity vanishes in the group’ (Njoku, 2002, p. 13). Wiredu would rather see African philosophy as ‘critical, individual reflection using modern logical and conceptual

techniques' (Oladipo, 1996, p. 14). In ethno-philosophy, the Wireduan view does not obtain as it (ethno-philosophy) is seen to be anchored in the communitarian thought process. The curious thing here is that the community seems to be the unit-focus. If we break it down further, it becomes the case that the group or society that is culturally situated, the ethnically conscious or tribal people is the attributive unit cognitive process. Ethno-philosophy purports or even threatens to rob philosophy of that which is most dear to it – supplanting the nucleus of philosophy with a non-nucleic peripheral group-factor. It tends to replace the individual as the unit cognitive process with the ethnic group or the 'group' so-called. It tends to dissolve individuality as constitutive of the philosophic endeavour with the community as a new entrant in this intellectual undertaking. The truth is that, were this to be true, in the logic of it, then, ethno-philosophy would have veered from philosophy in the strict sense. But as it stands, this claim, which only appears to be so on the surface, needs to be further interrogated. How then, is ethno-philosophy generally conceived both from Western and non-western scholars?

Exposition of views on ethno-philosophy

Ethno-philosophy, as indeed all of African philosophy, in the sense of methodological choice of linguistic expression, has its roots in Western philosophy. Ethno-philosophy, of the African bent, appropriates Western categories of thought into its cognitive methodology of self-expression. In another sense, ethno-philosophy under analytic discourse emerged from the worldview of the West. According to Maurier, 'There can be no philosophy without conceptual analysis' (Nnoruka, 2006, p. 48). The sense in which this is most true is the linguistic perspective, for the Africans express the product of their cognition in the linguistic parameters of the west. However, it can be argued in favour of the African, that the substantial issues thus expressed are purely African and as such, original to the spirit of the tribe or ethnic group to which such thought patterns pertain. The African philosopher strives to preserve the Africanity of the values under analysis. The end of ethno-philosophy is not necessarily the Africanization of conceptual schemes but the gearing towards the recovery of the Africanity of conceptual and, or analytic discourse. Westernization which usually assumes the linguistic-expressive character is more a scholarly than a pedestrian problem, for indeed, the ethnic people do not bother about that which they know nothing of, as they live their lives and pursue their aspirations in the purity of their ethnic world of being. The issue of concern here is not the Africanity of the thought process (which is almost fully guaranteed in ethno-philosophical discourse) but the validation of such a process as philosophical. If the latter counts in the present case then it becomes significant to the study of the vehicle through which this validation

is made possible. It becomes significant who says what and the means through which such conclusions are reached. With the works of philosophers like Karl Popper, we now know that such conclusions even from the most serious of respected scholars may need to undergo revisiting from time to time to ensure that they have not been subject to falsifiable verification. We revisit existing theories in order 'to replace them with better ones' (Magee, p. 222). The misconceptions in ethno-philosophy need revisiting to offer a better perception of the philosophical strand. Popper maintains that in science, 'errors are systematically criticized and ... in time corrected' (Magee, p. 222). It is in this sense that we further investigate ethno-philosophy.

Prior to the debate on the existence of African philosophy, there were written works on African philosophy (Obenga, 2004, pp. 31 – 49; Masolo, 2004, pp. 50 – 65; Sumner, 2004, pp. 172 – 182; etc). These works dated ranging from centuries to millennia. There were as well non-written works. These latter works could be situated within the existential realities of the people, for instance, in the genres of music, proverbs, folk tales, mythologies, dance and rituals, etc. During the debates, lots of works were put forward to enrich the corpus of philosophical literature in Africa. And of course, post-debate period has witnessed continual productions in African philosophy, especially with professional insights imbued with Western philosophical criteria and methods. In light of the strides made over time, it makes sense to surmise that African philosophy has made leaps in progress in the various dimensions of African life.

The new problem which African philosophy faces starting from the time of the debate is that of the criterion for validity. One could argue here that African philosophy since the time of the debate has moved on but this is really beside the point. The point is that African philosophy (ethno-philosophy) was a problem that scholars have portrayed in their works and like other such philosophical problems it continues to chart the trajectory of philosophical discourse within the African geo-locus or rather the African world; for instance, Tempelsianism has been said to be 'the paradigm of irrationality' (Masolo, 1995, p. 47) and this verdict can be made to apply to another such category of works. As a fundamental problem, it is by far much more relevant than discourses on African democracy, no matter how deeply significant the latter may be, since the outcome of discourses on the former has to determine the philosophical position of our discourses on political conceptualizations and pragmatics. There exists in ethno-philosophy, a valid source through which the African thinker draws inspiration for dialogue with the rest of the regions of the world.

The new problem is in the form of the denial that ethno-philosophy is philosophy in the strict sense. Since ethno-philosophy germinated so to speak, at least linguistically in the academic sense from Western philosophy, there is a sense in which it has got most of the

time to compare itself with the thought mode of the West. The West has always seen philosophy as an individual enterprise – a product of the intellectual activity of the philosopher who lays claim to his work and takes responsibility for such systematized reflections; the critical thinker sees or ‘feels himself as such’ (Masolo, 1995, p. 164). The unit of philosophic activity is the individual human who happens to be deeply involved in critical thinking and who makes his work known accordingly. This factor is an irreducible element of the discipline. In ethno-philosophy, what the scholar is confronted with is not the presupposed criterion above, but what is referred to as ‘collective thought’ (Njoku, 2002, pp. 12 – 13). It is not the individual reflective and critical thinking but the group at work in the thought process.

According to Hountondji, ‘Ethno-philosophy presents itself as a philosophy of the peoples rather than of individuals’ (Hallen, 2002, p. 50). This it could be argued stems from the deeply sociological conception in the effort to understand the African personality. The Africans participate in the social milieu in which they find themselves. He/she is heavily dependent on the group or the community. The community makes him/her. He is a communitarian being. If this is true, then he/she is a product of the community and this includes his/her thought processes. In such a worldview, it would be difficult to establish the type of independence of thought that is characteristic of the philosophic enterprise. Are reason and liberty then lacking in ethno-philosophy? Hegel claims so and on that account believes that philosophy is only possible in the West (Masolo, 1995, p. 164) where these factors are guaranteed. What this amounts to is that there would never be the equivalents of Thales, Anaximander, Socrates or Anaxagoras in ethno-philosophy not from the lacking of intellectual orientation perspectives but from the submersion of the fruits of individual intellectual endeavor in the corpus of community heritage. In the place of these, one comes across the philosophies of the people such as Bantu philosophy, Dogon philosophy, Yoruba philosophy, etc (Hallen, 2002, p. 50). The specific problem here is that of collective responsibility. Individual responsibility in the thinking process is replaced with collective responsibility.

The end of ethno-philosophy stems from the contestation of the African’s spirit and his/her perceived world of being. This contestation is what the African has internally defined for him/herself. Ethno-philosophy is the attempt at self-possession. If it is the case that the African perceives him/herself and their world of being as having been over-diluted, in a sense, from westernization, ethno-philosophy intends to reclaim in so far as is possible, some of the values that are fundamentally African but that have been devalued so to say in the course of cultural collision with the West. Ethno-philosophy factors this in, in its modern expository analysis. Hountondji, a father of critical ethno-philosophy of

the African strand, does not appear to agree less when he opines: 'African philosophers aim to define themselves and their peoples, in the face of Europe, without allowing anybody else to do it for them, to fix and petrify them at leisure' (Hountondji, 1983, p. 38).

If African philosophers have taken to a new consciousness of self re-definition; determined to begin to see themselves in their cosmological construct, for a clearer self understanding of their personality and identity, then it follows that part of that new awakening would be a shift in the methodology of this self exposition within the cultural ambience. There can no longer be academic adherence in the strict sense to a borrowed methodology of self-recovery. Ethno-philosophy tends to ruffle the status quo in the exercise of the new scholarship. Herein lay the genesis of the charge against ethno-philosophy.

Ethno-philosophy generates sentiments that vary in dimensions and ideological bearings. The issues are really complex and it is this complexity that this work would strive assiduously to simplify. Although some Western scholars would not take kindly to the emergence of ethno-philosophy, African scholars are also do not all agreed on the philosophic essence of works forwarded as ethno-philosophy. There lies the complexity: the cross-fire-contestations from both poles of scholarship in affirming and denying and then the need to unearth the reality amid the seemingly unending contests.

Ethno-philosophy – denials and claims

In his work, 'Ethno-philosophy as an African Philosophy: Evaluating the Critiques of the Critics', Oraegbunam captures Mbiti's view on African philosophy as, 'The understanding and attitude of the mind, logic and perception behind how African peoples think, act or speak in different life situations' (Oraegbunam, 2008, p. 78). Is there a way of thinking that is peculiarly African? One may answer this by saying that people's thought processes are somehow conditioned by their worldviews. The Africans cannot be seen as unique in this. Bacon anticipated this factorial influence in his 'idola mentis' – idols of the mind (Flew, 1984, p.37; Quinton, 1980, pp. 35 – 38). For Bacon, it is like we are influenced and must have succumbed to forces before we know that we are under the influence of such forces in the background. The early Greek thinkers were largely conditioned in their thought projections by their culture and the realities therein; philosophy thus is a product of culture and world views.

On a more specific note, Oraegbunam associates ethno-philosophy with Omenala, an Igbo encapsulation of the customs and traditions of the people as obtained in the community or their land (Oraegbunam, 2008, p.79). This strand of philosophy intends to convey that the

enterprise is not fundamentally different from the way the people look at the world in their *sitz in leben*: the place in which they happen to find themselves; in this case, the Igbo world. In another development, ethno-philosophy has been linked to restoration of the African personhood. In a high-profile discourse on African philosophy in the 21st century, Alozie postulates that discussions on metaphysics, logic, epistemology, etc as they pertain to African Philosophy must have a real relation to the burning issues of African survivalism (Alozie, 2008, p. 69). From a different methodology and ideology, this view may be said to project onto Senghor's 'nationalist culturalism' aimed at the articulation of African identity (Makumba, 2007, p. 120). The philosophy in this case is in the form of the seeking of cultural roots and assuming agency of the phenomenization of these articulated identities – deeply conceptual with some praxiological bearing!

The modification in Western style conceptions of philosophy was in modern times pioneered by Placide Tempels' ethno-philosophy of the Bantu tribal and cultural people. A feature of ethno-philosophy is its ontological basis; this Tempels claims for Bantu philosophy (Ocheng'-Odhiambo, 1994, p. 41). In ethno-philosophy, the metaphysical dimension stands out as it constitutes part and parcel of the African worldview. There is no doubt therefore that the object of ethno-philosophy is ontology fundamentally. Part of ethno-philosophy is coterminous with African metaphysics. Kagame's work on Rwandaise philosophy fits properly into ethno-philosophical discourse; a further investigation and complementation of the pioneering work of Tempels. Kagame surveyed the Rwandaise ethnic peoples extensively in terms of their cultural identity especially as conveyed in linguistic analyses and utility (Masolo, 1995, pp. 84 – 88). Kagame is of special interest since the East African scholar wrote most of his works in the mother tongue or vernacular. Is Kagame by opting for the mother tongue to be understood as a radicalizing influence and protagonist for ethno-philosophy? Is Kagame making a statement? Is he charting a course for the future direction of African Philosophy? The linguistic question in African philosophy appears to be a potent force that could direct the future trajectory of African philosophy. Beyond the immediate problem of ethno-philosophy, could Kagame be perhaps regarded as the prophet of a future paradigm shift in African philosophy from the point of view of originality in linguistic orientation? These are pertinent questions that have to be dealt with in detail and that will go beyond the scope of the present research.

Works on ethno-philosophy continue to impact African philosophy since they have messages to offer to the world of philosophy. The substance of philosophy is the idea therein and ethno-philosophy promises to enrich the world of philosophy with varieties of idea-generation from tribes, peoples and cultures. The issue is: are philosophers agreed

that the contents of ethno-philosophy are as philosophical as the counterparts from concatenations of Western thinkers whose philosophies are regarded as individual cognitive canons for celebration?

Views of some African and non-African professional philosophers on ethno-philosophy

GWF Hegel remains the Western prototype of scholars who deny Africa the capacity to think. Philosophy is a product of rationality and liberty which in the thinking of Hegel only the West can guarantee (Masolo, 1995, p. 164). His attempt to intellectually relocate Egypt to the West was well known since in his thinking, it appeared to him that the continued presence of Egypt within Africa tended to confer on Africa the capacity to think and contribute to the world of ideas (Ochieng'-Odhiambo, 1995, pp. 2 – 6). The Hegelian theory that denied philosophy to Africa was to be the foundation upon which many other Western thinkers had to lean in the future consideration of African philosophy, a trend that Asouzu referred to as an “infamous contest” among diehard Hegelians of the West (Asouzu, 2007, p. 27). Over time, it became difficult for some of the Western scholars to shake Hegel off their thinking about Africa.

Hengelbrock, as captured in Asouzu believes that African philosophy qualifies only as “African thinking” or “wisdom”, not philosophy. He grants that there are ‘philosophical elements or views of life in African proverbs, myth, pedagogical and religious narrations, as well as in proverbs and tales of my Westfalian country. But I think we don’t need to speak about philosophy here. It would be better to speak about wisdom (Asouzu, 2007, p. 28). In the opinion of Hengelbrock, ethno-philosophy does not qualify as a strand in African philosophy. Intellectual generosity could be extended in the permission to call it African wisdom but never philosophy. In this, the tradition established by Hegel sustains. This mind cast is not peculiar to the West. Some African scholars do share in this intellectual denial of assigning the status of philosophy to ethno-philosophy. Okere sees philosophy as the creative work of an individual intellect. He regards ethno-philosophical strand as ‘collective uncriticized world views’ (Nnoruka, 2006, p. 47). In another perspective, Okolo denied that philosophy could be expanded in its understanding in such a manner as to include the ‘collective views of African peoples, their myths, folktales, communal wisdom, idioms, etc.’ accusing some scholars of ‘peddling all sorts of “wares” as African philosophies and with all kinds of labels such as “ethno-philosophy”, “philosophic sagacity”, “Nationalist ideological philosophy”’, etc (Okolo, 1993, p. 43). For Okolo, it was nothing short of an abuse of terms to apply ‘philosophy’ to ethno-philosophy. Ethno-philosophy in Okolo’s perspective was denoted by all sorts of “wares”. Philosophic sagacity is of course topically ethno-philosophy. Philosophic sagacity and

Nationalist ideological philosophy were obviously in reference to the works of Kwasi Wiredu and Henry Odera Oruka (Wiredu, 1995, p. 9) who contributed immensely in these areas. Wiredu distinguishes between African philosophy as folk thought and African philosophy as a critique-project of conceptual analytic techniques (Oladipo, 1996, p. 14). Oruka's differentiation of six trends in African philosophy is well known (Makumba, 2007, p. 100). The views of the academic and professional philosophers were in some way expected given the different orientations and philosophical affiliations that formed the basis of their arguments. Training goes a long way in the programming of the mind. It was not to be expected that automatic affirmation be accorded ethno-philosophy by all of the professional philosophers. Perhaps there was a need for time, more research and clarifications of issues to enable gradualized and progressive appreciation of the ethno-philosophical strand.

Ethno-philosophy – logic and facts

The critique of ethno-philosophy from scholars, as noted above, is a function of schools of thought and ideological affiliations. Obviously, most of these scholars were trained in the logical positivist school. This school has sought, over time, to strip philosophy of its ontological basis. Even metaphysics was redefined in terms of functional descriptivism in the concerted endeavour to deny its substantial character. Positivism (also, logical positivism) of the A J Ayer strand, was strong in its scientific quests and the reductionism of the philosophic enterprise to the tenets of empirical science. This being the case, it follows from the logical angle, that ethno-philosophy would seek to negate this quest since the fundamental place of ontology is part and parcel of ethno-philosophy of the African strand. Ethno-philosophy would rather be sympathetic to the mystical rather than seeking after the purely scientific. The important point is that the mystical may not always pass for the non-intelligible and if and when properly articulated, has a place in philosophy. However, ethno-philosophy is not solely about African mysticism and the place of the spirit in African affairs. It is also about the culture, the social and economic praxis, the logic and the cosmos of transactions and realities that impact communal life: life and death perspectives in African cultural understanding; the concept of 'Destiny'; Time and facts or measurement of duration; reincarnation and the cosmological constructs relating visible and perceptible realities to the circumstantialities of the non-visible domain of ancestral and non-human operations, etc.

The school of classical literary studies, to which some of the critics belonged, is in silhouette influenced by immersion in western classics. Ethno-philosophy would not promise anything near to the classical ideas of intellectuals such as Socrates, Plato and

Aristotle for instance. Western literature is replete with classics. This school offers cognitive regimentation which every other material has to live up to before being regarded as philosophical. Jurgen Hengelbrock and Kimmerle in their exchanges of perspectives, even though German in orientation, did agree between them that every philosophy must not conform to the Western rubrics before being acknowledged as philosophical (Asouzu, 2007, p. 27). If this is the case, then the classical rationalists may have to allow that African philosophy existed ranging from centuries to millennia past, and therefore not just springing up from the works of the modern thinkers in the mid-twentieth century. By extension, they ought to see the need to also grant that ethno-philosophy could be a possibility.

The charges against ethno-philosophy and the logic of its existence

The substantial charge against ethno-philosophy borders on the collective responsibility which informs the purported characterizing cognition proper to it. On this account, some scholars, such as Hountondji, would counter that it is more of cultural anthropology or ethnology than philosophy. A further examination proves that the charge is false. The reason behind this is that in their particularities and itemizations, ethno-philosophy would enlist in its pertinent topics cultural and existential paradigms of thought as seen in proverbs, folktales, folk-medicine, music and songs, dance, figures of speech, and the whole of the customs of the people in its philosophical considerations. Nwala would encapsulate most of the scope covered by ethno-philosophy in Omenala, from the Igbo perspective. It is there 'in the institutions, social practices, as well as the moral codes, metaphysics, religion, art and oral literature of traditional society' (Nwala, 1997, pp. 113). Cultural anthropology may have to deal with aspects of these in its collation and exposition of the cultural practices that make the people thick. However, the province of philosophy in this strand of African philosophy is clearly demarcated from that of anthropology. First of all, philosophy does not aim at descriptive relay of available cultural practices. Philosophy is more interested in how these have been able to build and hold society together over time. These remain structural constructs upon which society stands.

The real case for denial is the comprehension of the above aspects of communal existence as collective wisdom, in the words of Jurgen Hengelbrock (Asouzu, 2007, p. 28). The emphasis is on mind collectivity. If this charge is allowed to stand, then ethno-philosophy has been swept off its foundation. However, as it stands, this critique is again quite false from the logical perspective. Ethno-philosophy has to exclude collective wisdom or the so-called collective enterprise if it has to be understood for what it is. What does it entail collective wisdom, collective enterprise, communal thinking, and communal pool of

knowledge? All these coalesce onto the non-individualization of philosophic labour. Western rubrics recognize that the philosophic enterprise must be an individual activity. The community does not have to come in, in the thinking process. Philosophy deals with the individual in contradistinction to the community as the unit-cognitive process. Sociology, ethnology or cultural anthropology deals with the community as a unit; as the communal nucleus or starting point of interrogation. Philosophy starts and ends with the thinking individual. Why? Cognition involves the mind, a practical living mind that belongs to the human person, and in this case, an 'individual' human person. There is a need to underscore that the community has no mind in the practical sense of it; the so-called community mind is simply a gratuitous attribution. This is rather better comprehended as semiotic and adumbrative. The community mind is a pure symbolic representation, a figure of speech, a non-existent conceptualization meant to fill a role. One may conceive of the community mind the way one could conceive the corporate entity as a person with rights and privileges. The human mind has a real relation to the individual human person. The point of the issue is the inextricability of this attribute to the concreteness of the individuality of the human person. Whereas there is no instance of the human person without a mind, there is always and necessarily no instance of a community concept that includes the concretization of an existing operational mind. Therefore, the cognitive process is purely individualized or individualistic even within the communal context. If this is true, then the reference to collective responsibility in the cogitation process is false philosophically. This is a logical aberration. To the base, a philosophical edifice meant to deny whole cultural identities and their place in the world of ideas on the demonstrably illogical invites more questions than the solution it promises to proffer. The individual takes responsibility for his/her philosophic activity. The logic of the former, that is, collective wisdom, whether of western, eastern or African origin remains falsifiable.

When reference is made to African collective wisdom, it simply stands for logic on its head. It can easily be deciphered the opportunism in this claim for cognitive pejoratives, the preponderance to underrating the individual African mind. Proverbs, folklores, songs and music, etc may belong to the community in the sense that the community has custodianship of the pool of information developed over the years, but the fact remains that these contents in the scope of ethno-philosophy have had individualistic tags in terms of their origination. There is no African proverb that was not first worked out in the individual human person's mind before being let out into the community value heritage. The individual African sage must have had time to wrestle with ideas as products of the cognitive process which he/she must have fine-tuned to measure up to standardized

thought patterns worthy of community appropriation before making a debut of its usage in the communal arena. Every music or song, folktale or myth, dance genre of wise saying belongs first to an individual author. Therefore, the African songster/songstress is always an individualized person with the unique talent to capture soul-searing realities in song. I do not think that any Westerner or African, no matter the scholarly affiliation would deny this. What needs to be denied emphatically is the idea of collective thought which some scholars use to dislodge African contributions to the pool of human knowledge as a conscionable fabrication that fails to withstand further attempts at a reduction to its logical conclusion or even empirical verification.

The glossing over of true logical position does not make for a fair deal in philosophy. Otherwise, what is true of African philosophy in its ethno-philosophical strand is equally true of Western philosophy or even Chinese philosophy. The classical Greek thinkers did not write philosophy 'de novo'. They sourced a lot of materials from their cultural world of being and built their philosophy around them. One needs to read the works of Aristotle to appreciate his use of proverbs in his philosophical discourses. What of the pre-Socratics? One can think of Heraclitus of Ephesus and his aphorisms which are drawn from the cultural matrix and imbued with transcending cognitive quality and of course Plato with the recourse to mythic explanations when that seemed an appropriate tool for didacticism. If the West accuses Africa of cultural elemental contents of thought, that in effect is no criticism: it is rather a positive acknowledgement of the rich and true sources of philosophic reflection to which the African philosopher has free access.

The other critique of ethno-philosophy deriving from the earlier analysis is the problem of identifying the individual philosophers who we claim have contributed to the individuality of the thought process in such topical issues as proverbs, music development or folklore. Who are these Africans? What are their names? The simple reply is that their names must have been lost to the vagaries of time in antiquity but this does not deny them the entitlement to the individuality of their philosophical ideas. Keeping such records of who did what is not necessarily a pre-requisite to philosophy though recognizably important. Bodunrin maintains that writing is not a prerequisite to philosophy (Nnoruka, 2006, p. 48). The more important thing remains the substantial ideas not necessarily the philosophers who originally authored them. What we have lost in anonymous African philosophy are aspects of historical props to existing ideas, not the ideas that are needed to build the community. While the former adds colour to philosophy, the latter suffices substantially as philosophy. Here African philosophy is contented in dealing with the essential while the merely important may permit to be done away with.

The other critique that may need to be attended to is that the so-called collective wisdom is of its nature uncritical. They are there to be appropriated as occasions demand but they

are not subject to criticism and may not offer useful critique which defines the systematic reflective activity of philosophy. This too is a falsity. There are inbuilt critical factors in an ethno-philosophic pool of knowledge. African approach to criticism is mostly dialectical as attempts are made to avoid confrontation. For the West, this is a huge minus in the absence of sustained critical discourse but for Africa, this is a methodological masterpiece. The African is ever conscious of the preservation of the integrity of the other and achieves this by the exercise of critique-in-dialogue. Criticism can therefore be dialectical and implied in the ensuing discourse. This caution notwithstanding, however, the same goals are achieved. Although there are occasions for direct critical assessment or even confrontation as done in Western categories of thought; in most of the African approaches, personal criticism is always attenuated: this is made possible in the relevancy of proverbial insertions in speech delivery as occasions demand. This demands skill and training and retraining in the mastery of the art of communication with deep philosophic insight. Therefore, ethno-philosophy is not devoid of critique-relevance which defines the individual human person's full development of the cognitive process. The African approach, on occasion, is just more complex, more demanding of philosophic skills and indeed more humane. Therefore, the so-called lack of critical quality in ethno-philosophy is only apparent and never real.

In another perspective, the critique of ethno-philosophy to the effect that community wisdom is sometimes a product of the community in session passes for half the logic of the origin of ideas in ethno-philosophy. The tribal peoples do meet often in assemblies for deliberation on communal matters. At those times, ideas are generated and eventually, those ideas belong to the community. The fact remains that the community is devoid of mind in the actual sense; the minds that produce the ideas are individualistic even if the community provides a forum for the individualistic exchange of ideas. As a matter of fact, in typical African communal assemblies, a forum is offered to the individual thinker for reflective discourse. The discourse which does not exclude the critical content is always expected to be a marathon survey of the crucial issues upon which the gathering is centred. The lengthy examination of issues which pertains to each thinker at intervals during the assembly could pass for an anthology of sorts in communal-based critical discourse. A comprehensive record of the discourses contributed to respectively by the members would pass for a sizable volume in African cultural and critical anthologies. In other words, the aggregate of the person's discourses stand over and in real relation to the author and of course belongs to him/her in the true sense.

Ethnophilosophy – further considerations

Ethno-philosophy promises to be a mine of riches for the philosophic enterprise. Ethno-philosophy brings along its characteristic features into philosophy. The program may be a recipe for further diversification of the philosophic process. The strand calls for a paradigm shift in philosophy. With ethno-philosophy, the approach to the science and art of philosophy may have to witness changes or modifications. This is especially concerning methodology. If it is agreed that the West may not need to stick solely to a criterion of methodology concerning African philosophy, this calls among other things, for a methodology proper to ethno-philosophy. The methodology, it appears, that is most suited to ethno-philosophy is hermeneutical reflections. Barry Hallen agrees no less with this development (Hallen, 2002, p. 56). Hermeneutics deals with scientific interpretations of phenomena. The phenomena in question are in terms not only textual but also cosmological and behavioural. These are extant values though hidden and so would remain until unearthed through proper interpretation. Ethno-philosophy would work to offer these values to the world of philosophy. In the end, the contemporary era would have been richer, more knowledgeable and more taught. One supposes at this point that Hegel has seen the need for self-revision, to be able to acknowledge the presupposition that both reason and liberty are immanent in African culture as far as cognition and its expression are concerned.

Ethno-philosophy does not define the whole of African philosophy. Its assured place borders on substance and essence since it connects the other strands of African philosophy to their origination point from which they show further relevance. Ethno-philosophy being constitutive of the array of strands in African philosophy completes the chain of the reflective process and variants in African philosophy. Finally, ethno-philosophy promises to be a continuation of philosophy generally understood as it adds value to Western thought patterns. Ethno-philosophy comprehensively is not merely an African affair: it connects to philosophy generally perceived. The hermeneutic current of thought which intentionally suits the methodological research of choice in the field of ethno-philosophy has its derivations and origination in Western philosophy, precisely German research methodology. Therefore, it shares somewhat in this global impact and influence. Ethno-philosophy stands to enrich and be enriched by the global world of philosophy. In ethno-philosophy, philosophy does not lose its universalism as the themes discussed in ethno-philosophy may also have universal appeal; the only unique characteristic is that such themes take their origin from given cultural geo-loci.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that philosophy existed before its having been articulated and externalized as an intellectual pursuit. The record of its emergence in the 6th century B C in the West remains a case for historical convenience. This notwithstanding, there is a sense in which one may opine that philosophy is as old as mankind. It may have met potentiation in cultures warranting its conscious emergence among peoples at different times. Whether in the orient or occident or Africa, philosophy is unarguably a cultural reality. It first emerged from the reflections on the cultural problematic: whether it first appeared as a phenomenon of the cosmos as evidenced in the Greek project of the 6th century BC, or as a phenomenon of the transcendence of the human spirit in the face of anthropocentric realism regarding human suffering as evidenced in oriental philosophies, whose development stretch to millennia in the historical past, one common factor runs through them: the cultural relations and base. In Africa, ethno-philosophy essentially aligns philosophy to the cultural realities of Africa, to the mystical, the empirical, the metaphysical and ontological. As a trend, it captures the central theme in the reflective activity concerning the cultural issues that explain most of what Africa is and does. It properly addresses the ontological basis of such reflections. Thus, the whole of African cultural reality falls within the scope of ethno-philosophical discourse.

If the above is true, then it as well addresses the fact of the authenticity of ethno-philosophy as a strand in African philosophy. The present work does not gratuitously grant that ethno-philosophy suffices as a strand of African philosophy; it endeavoured to prove it. This adds value to African philosophy, in the sense of offering reasons for the status of its validity and thereby providing the needed links and dialogical encounter both with African philosophy understood in its variants and strands and also with the global world of philosophical discourse, with particular reference to hermeneutical methodology through which it can always exchange ideas with the East and the West.

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