

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND QUESTIONS OF RATIONALITY AND SYSTEMATIZATION IN EGYPTIAN MYSTERY METHOD

Barnabas E. Izegege*

Abstract

The question of existence and nature of African philosophy are problems that have pre-occupied African thinkers, alongside the superiority of the Egyptian mystery school over the Western philosophic traditions. This argument will clarify the question of primacy in the philosophic traditions of the western Greek philosophy and the traditional African philosophy that bedeviled the general discussion of philosophy of the African people in recent times, as the problems of language, documentation and identity seem not to pull the waves anymore. This work is set to answer the question, whether the Egyptian mystery system whatever it was, was a systematic work or a work of pure reason; with the hope that this clarification will affirm to which tradition best enjoys the evidence; systematization or pure reason.

Keywords: Rationality, Systematization, Egyptology, Mystery Method

Introduction

African Philosophy has been under attacked by the Eurocentric thinkers in particular and from the other clime by our indigenous Africans who argue that philosophy as a critical and coherence science cannot be indigenous. They forget that the concept indigenous means original and home-grown; meaning that it is peculiar to a particular people white or black. For them, Africa philosophy is found wanting due to the historic lack and want of universal language (problems of language) and antiquity evidences (problem of documentation). These being the case however, they forget that problems cannot give birth to absolute denial as for example, the problem of the Nigerian polity cannot deny that the nation Nigeria no longer exists. However, their position of language and documentation lack have strengthened the African desire for scholarship among Africans to investigate their history and evidences of antiquity as this paper tries to proof that the presence of rationality and systematization in the Egyptian mystery method; the ground for African philosophy is not only the authority for the existence of philosophy in African but goes to show that it has a system and at the same time is very rational and in perspective to the Africans.

Philosophy

We know that there is no one answer to the question of philosophy and this is one of the reasons, is a problem creating and problem solving discipline. Among professional philosophers, these differences are acceptable. In this regards, scholars like William James states that “philosophy in the full sense is only man thinking, thinking about generalities rather than particular”(William, 2000: 76). For him, generalities are those realities that must be sensible to others. Thus, Epicurus describes philosophy as an “activity which secures the happy life by means of discussion and argument” (Omoregbe, 1990: 1) the emphasis here is “activity”. While Plato describes the philosopher as a man whose passion is to seek

the truth, a man whose heart is fixed on reality (1). These definitions suggest that the enterprise of philosophy is seeking after truth through activity of consciousness. This truth, this reality which must undergo some process of discussion and argument is not arbitrary in nature. However, philosophy is a process which makes it a scientific study through some conscious activities. Thus John Dewey opined that philosophy is a thinking which has become conscious of itself as A.J. Ayer states that philosophy is an activity of analysis (Ayer, 1940: 37). This is the background upon which it is generally agreed that philosophy is an exercise of the mind which requires a critical, coherent analysis of truth by means of intellectual reflection. This intellectual sense that is, (intelligent reflection of reality) is present in every philosophic tradition and culture whether Western philosophy or African philosophy.

African Philosophy

If we have associated philosophy to be a reflective, coherent and critical activity of the mind, which takes place in the life of a man, and if it is true that the African person is a man, then there is philosophy of the African man. From a general sense, African philosophy is the philosophy produced by African people, a philosophy that presents African worldviews or that uses distinct African philosophical methods in reflection (Janz, 74-79). Although African philosophers may be found in various fields of philosophy like metaphysics, epistemology, political philosophy and the likes, most modern African philosophy have been concerned with defining the ethno-philosophical parameters of African philosophy and identify what differentiates it from other philosophical traditions (95). According to K.C. Anyanwu, in Peters that which concerns itself with the way in which African people of the past and present make use of their destiny and of the world in which they live is African philosophy (Peters, 11). In this regards, African philosophy is a critical reflection on African leadership in the administration of their duties towards their citizens. African philosophy is a rational, critical inquiry on Africans and their world, and this is why J.S. Mbiti said that African philosophy is the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African people think, act or speak in different situations in life (Mbiti, 63). And in the words of P. Hountondji, it is a literature produced by Africans and dealing with philosophical issues (Hountondji, 63). In all of these explications, we see that African philosophy is the whole of the world view of the African people. Thus, the argument for the claim of the existence of philosophy of the African people is sustained.

Egyptology and Historicity

Egyptology is the study of the language, history and culture of the ancient Egypt including the archeology, inscriptions and language. It began around the 5th millennium BC until the end of its native religious practices in the 4th century AD. In Europe, particularly on the Continent, Egyptology is primarily regarded as being a philological discipline, while in North America it is often regarded as a branch

of archaeology. Some of the first historical accounts of Egypt were given by Herodotus, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus and the largely lost work of Manetho, an Egyptian priest, during the reign of Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II in the 3rd century BC. Thutmose IV restored the Sphinx and had the dream that inspired his restoration carved on the famous Dream Stele. Less than two centuries later, Prince Khaemweset, fourth son of Ramesses II, is famed for identifying and restoring historic buildings, tombs and temples including the pyramid (63). The Ptolemies were much interested in the work of the ancient Egyptians, and many of the Egyptian monuments, including the pyramids, were restored by them (although they built many new temples in the Egyptian style). The Romans too carried out restoration work in this most ancient of lands. Throughout the Middle Ages travelers on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land would occasionally deviate to visit sites within Egypt, which would include Cairo and its environs, where the Holy Family was thought to have fled, and the great Pyramids, which were thought to be Joseph's Granaries, built by the Hebrew patriarch to store grain during the years of plenty. A number of their accounts (*Itineraria*) have survived and offer insights as to conditions in their respective time periods (Chareyron, 97). European exploration and travel writings of ancient Egypt commenced from the 13th century onward, with only occasional detours into a more scientific approach, notably by Claude Sicard, Benoît de Maillet, Frederic Louis Norden and Richard Pococke. In the early 17th century, John Greaves measured the pyramids, having inspected the broken Obelisk of Domitian in Rome, and then destined for the Earl of Arundel's collection in London (Okasha, 9781598742800). He went on to publish the illustrated *Pyramidographia* in 1646, while the Jesuit scientist-priest Athanasius Kircher was perhaps the first to hint at the phonetic importance of Egyptian hieroglyphs, demonstrating Coptic as a vestige of early Egyptian, for which he is considered a "founder" of Egyptology.

In the late 18th century, with Napoleon's scholars' recording of Egyptian flora, fauna and history (published as *Description de l'Égypte*), the study of many aspects of ancient Egypt became more scientifically oriented. The British captured Egypt from the French and gained the Rosetta Stone. Modern Egyptology is generally perceived as beginning about 1822: Egyptology's modern history begins with the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte. The subsequent publication of *Description de l'Égypte* between 1809 and 1829 made numerous ancient Egyptian source materials available to Europeans for the first time (William, 87).

Jean-François Champollion, Thomas Young and Ippolito Rosellini were some of the first Egyptologists of wide acclaim. The German Karl Richard Lepsius was an early participant in the investigations of Egypt; mapping, excavating, and recording several sites. Champollion announced his general decipherment of the system of Egyptian hieroglyphics for the first time, employing the Rosetta Stone as his primary aid. The Stone's decipherment was a very important development of Egyptology. With subsequently ever-increasing knowledge of Egyptian writing and language, the study of Ancient Egyptian civilization was able to proceed with greater academic rigor and with all the added impetus that comprehension of the written sources was able to engender. Egyptology became more professional via

work of William Matthew Flinders Petrie, among others. Petrie introduced techniques of field preservation, recording, and excavating. Howard Carter's expedition brought much acclaim to the field of Egyptology. Many highly educated amateurs now also travelled to Egypt, however, including women such as Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale, who both left philosophical accounts of their travels, which revealed learned familiarity with all the latest European Egyptology.

In the modern era, the Ministry of State for Antiquities, controls excavation permits for Egyptologists to conduct their work. The field can now use geophysical methods and other applications of modern sensing techniques to further Egyptology. Egyptology was established as an academic discipline through the research of Emmanuel de Rougé in France, Samuel Birch in England, and Heinrich Brugsch in Germany. In 1880, Flinders Petrie, another British Egyptologist, revolutionized the field of archaeology through controlled and scientifically recorded excavations. Petrie's work determined that Egyptian culture dated back as early as 4500 BCE (<http://meppi.me.org>).

While Egyptology is widely studied in continental Europe, only Leiden University offers English taught degree programs in Egyptology. Societies for Egyptology include:

1. The Society for the Study of Ancient Egypt.
2. The Society for the Study of Ancient Egyptian Antiquities, Canada, Sussex Egyptology.
3. Society Online and Egypt Exploration Society.

The earliest theory of salvation is the Egyptian theory. The Egyptian Mystery System had it that it is the most important object, the deification of man, and taught that the soul of man if liberated from its bodily fetters could enable him to become godlike and see the Gods in this life and attain the beatific vision and hold communion with the Immortals (Ancient Mysteries, C. H. Vail, 25).

The Egyptian Mystery School

The "Egyptian Mystery System" as George James in his book *Stolen Legacy* points out "had as its most important object, the deification of man, and taught that the soul of man, if liberated from its bodily fetters, could enable him to become godlike and see the Gods in this life and attain the beatific vision and hold communion with the Immortals." It sought the liberation of the mind from its finite consciousness, when it becomes one and is identified with the Infinite. This liberation was not only freedom of the soul from bodily impediments, but also from the wheel of reincarnation or rebirth. It involved a process of disciplines (several liberal arts) or purification (ten virtues, negative confessions, Book of Coming Forth by Day) both for the body and soul." (Cf. *The Symbolism of the Crown in Ancient Egypt*, by Richard D. King Journal of African Civilizations, November 1984 (vol. 6, no. 2).

The Seven Liberal Arts, which formed the foundation training for all Neophytes includes, Grammar, Arithmetic, Rhetoric and Dialectic (i.e., the Quadrivium) and Geometry, Astronomy and Music (i.e., the Trivium).

1. Grammar — the Art of Sentence Structure.
2. Arithmetic — the Art of Numerical Properties.
3. Rhetoric — the Art of Moral Appeals.
4. Dialectic — the Art of Logical Arguments.
5. Geometry — the Art of Tangible Objects.
6. Astronomy — the Art of Celestial Objects.
7. Music — the Art of Sonorous Arrangements.

In the ten Principles of Virtue, the Neophyte must;

1. Control his thoughts.
2. Control his actions.
3. Have devotion of purpose.
4. Have faith in the ability of his master to teach him the truth.
5. Have faith in himself to assimilate the truth.
6. Have faith in himself to wield the truth.
7. Be free from resentment under the experience of persecution.
8. Be free from resentment under experience of wrong.
9. Cultivate the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.
10. Cultivate the ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal (he must have a sense of values).

Systematization

The term ‘system’ comes from the Latin word *systema*, from Greek σύστημα *systema*: “whole concept made of several parts or members” literary a ‘composition’ (H. George et al.). According to Marshall McLuhan, ‘System’ means ‘something to look at’. You must have a very high visual gradient to have systematization. But in philosophy, prior to Descartes, there was no ‘system’. Plato had no ‘system’ as philosophy is today is concern with methodic system strictly speaking and so also was Aristotle (McLuhan’ 288). In the 19th century the French physicist Nicolas Léonard Sadi Carnot, studied thermodynamics, pioneered to the development of the concept of a ‘system’ in the natural sciences and in 1824 he studied the system which he called the working substance (typically a body of

water vapor) in steam engines, in regards to the system's ability to do work when heat is applied to it. The working substance could be put in contact with either a boiler, a cold reservoir (a stream of cold water), or a piston (to which the working body could do work by pushing on it). In 1850, the German physicist Rudolf Clausius generalized this picture to include the concept of the surroundings and began to use the term "working body" when referring to the system. The biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901–1972) became one of the pioneers of the general systems theory and in 1945 he introduced models, principles, and laws that apply to generalized systems or their subclasses, irrespective of their particular kind, the nature of their component elements, and the relation or 'forces' between them.

From the forgoing, systematization, a concept that gave birth to the ideology-SYSTEMATIC or a set of things working together as parts of a mechanism, or an interconnecting network; a complex whole. It is a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done. An activity or result of distributing or disposing persons or things properly or methodically. It is the act of codifying; arranging in a systematic order. This is philosophy because is and organized body of coherent thought which asks question and solves problems.

Rationality as Pure Reason

In philosophy, the faculty or process of drawing logical inferences is known as pure reason. It is natural logic. The term "reason" is also used in several other, narrower senses. Reason is in opposition to sensation, perception, feeling, desire, as the faculty (the existence of which is denied by empiricists) by which fundamental truths are intuitively apprehended. These fundamental truths are the causes or "reasons" of all derivative facts. According to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, reason is the power of synthesizing into unity, by means of comprehensive principles, the concepts that are provided by the intellect (Kant, 98). That reason which gives a priori principles Kant calls "pure reason," as distinguished from the "practical reason," which is especially concerned with the performance of actions. In formal logic the drawing of inferences (frequently called "ratiocination," from Latin *ratiocinari*, "to use the reasoning faculty") is classified from Aristotle on as deductive (from generals to particulars) and inductive (from particulars to generals). On the other hand, in theology, reason, as distinguished from faith, is the human intelligence exercised upon religious truth whether by way of discovery or by way of explanation. The limits within which reason may be used have been laid down differently in different churches and periods of thought: on the whole, modern Christianity, especially in the Protestant churches, tends to allow reason a wide field, reserving, however, as the sphere of faith the ultimate (supernatural) truths of theology. These two explanations point to one thing, that reason is the faculty of human intelligence and this form of intelligence is basically natural and is closely related to intuition and

this is the reason it may not be systematic in practical, formal or professional philosophy since it lacks methodic systematization.

The Egyptian Mystery System and Facts

The Egyptian mystery school according to George James in his book *Stolen Legacy*, is that ancient mystical institute that professed “the deification of man and taught that the soul of man if liberated from its bodily fetters, could enable him to become godlike and see the Gods in this life and attain the beatific vision and hold communion with the Immortals”, invariably connoting that it is a school of human inner freedom taught the liberation of the mind from its finite consciousness when it becomes one and is identified with the Infinite. All of these points to one fact that once upon a time, there was the existence of a school in Egypt whether formal or informal (whatever it was) was referred to as the Egyptian Mystery school where scholars like Pythagoras spent 22 years in the temples and cults of **Isis** and **Osiris** in Egypt as an initiate of the ancient mysteries, aware the mystery school taught secret wisdom and knowledge and existed for over 3,000 years. The ancient people of Greece, Rome and Persia had contacts with Egyptians, Ethiopians and Nubians and had no doubt that they were black. Herodotus, as earlier mentioned, recognized the skin color of the people he visited. It is also worthy of note that, long before the visits of Herodotus, Egypt’s Golden Age was over and several invasions of Egypt by the Hyksos, Persians, Nubians had occurred. If there had been a mixed race in Egypt as a consequence of these invasions, it would have been evident to Herodotus.

This is how Herodotus described the people he encountered: The Colchians Egyptians and Ethiopians have thick lips, broad noses, woolly hair and they are burnt of skin. “They were descendants of African soldiers left behind by pharaoh Sesotris on the banks of Phasis River in Asia Minor during his military expedition. Apart from physical features similar to those of the Egyptians, they also spoke the same language and practiced circumcision. Constantin Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, who visited Egypt in 1787, wrote that what Herodotus said had solved for him the problem of why the people of Egypt were so black and woolly haired, and especially the sphinx of Giza—the supreme symbol of worship and power. There is the Nile, there is the ruin of Thebes where once lived a people who discovered, while others were yet barbarians, the elements of the arts and sciences... a race of men now rejected from society because of their sable skin and frizzled hair, yet who founded on the study of the laws of nature those civil and religious system which still govern so large a portion of the universe”(99). According to Volney, it was among the ancient black people of Africa and Asia that international trade developed, and that as a by-product of these contacts, there ensued the exchange of ideas and cultural practices that formed the basis of ancient world civilization. The count stated that the Egyptians were the first people to attain the physical and moral sciences necessary to civilized life. It was then on the borders of the Upper Nile, among a black race of man, that was organized the complicated system of the worship of stars, considered in relation to the production of the earth and the labor of agriculture and this first worship, characterized by their adoration under their own forms and national attributes, was a simple proceeding of the human mind.

There is further testimony of the Egyptians' black identity by scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who did not visit the ruins. Their dilemma, which was known as the "Egyptian Problem," is correctly put by J. A. de Gobineau: "If it had been scientifically 'proved' that Blacks were biologically incapable of civilization, how could one explain ancient Egypt which was originally placed on the African continent" (100). Martin Bernal, in the section of *Black Athena* titled "what color were the Egyptians," states that professor Jean Devisse, a French historian of the early Christian church, "had expressed surprise at how many blacks there appear to be in early Christian portrayals of Egyptians...and has also shown that there also appears to have been a relation between black and Egyptians wisdom. Many medieval and renaissance paintings portray one of the Magi presumably an Egyptian as a black" (Bernal, 1-84472-063-2) thus, the Egyptian mystery school is that ancient system where wisdom and knowledge were learnt and taught as existent in African Philosophy, its geographical location and ownership.

The Systematization Question in the Egyptian Mystery School

In philosophy and formal education, reason is seen as the faculty or process of drawing logical inferences in the realm natural logic. However, if rationality is the power of human abstraction, a form of intelligence which is basically natural, it will wrong to say strictly that such is deficient in systematization for the of lack of formal, professional and academic training as was in the case of the Egyptian mystery school which was cultural in perspective. No wonder, Immanuel Kant said, that reason is power of synthesizing unity by means of comprehensive principles, the concepts that are provided by the intellect. In his article, arguing for Egyptology, the energy healing research states, when I studied the Egyptian mystical traditions, I learned that all the ancient Egyptian arts were controlled by the temples, only if you belonged to a temple could you paint, sculpt, write hieroglyphics, and design buildings, the Egyptian system of art, writing, and architecture didn't change for thousands of years (<http://www.EgyptianMysterySchool.htm>).

The tradition was maintained, controlled, and taught within the religious system of the temples. The artists were priests and priestesses who had received rigorous, systematic training within a system of graduated stages of both practical and spiritual skills. In the beginning, students were taught the basic eye/hand control, coordination, and techniques of drawing. They were taught the meaning of the various geometrical forms and symbols, and the effect of those forms on nature. They were taught never to change the exact angles and proportions of the figures and forms. They weren't allowed to change anything; everything had a prescription. Thus the Egyptian knowledge of sacred geometry was kept intact generation after generation, for thousands of years intact and unchanged. One can say that the school though an informal academic system relied on religious mysteries, human rationally for her systematization.

From my findings on this matter, I state as already perceived, that the Egyptian mystery school (whatever it was), was a work of pure reason in a strict sense of what rationality and was systematic since it followed logical principles in learning. Unorganized as it may appear for lack of formal education, was relevant and laudable for its procedures, methodologies and codifications and curriculum and these makes it systematic.

Conclusion

In the beginning, students were taught the basic eye/hand control, coordination, and techniques of drawing. They were taught the meaning of the various geometrical forms and symbols, and the effect of those forms on nature. They were taught never to change the exact angles and proportions of the figures and forms. The further they progressed in their training, the more information they received about the techniques and theory of this art. They weren't allowed to change anything; everything had a prescription. Thus the Egyptian knowledge of sacred geometry was kept intact generation after generation, for thousands of years intact and unchanged.

The Egyptian mystery school (whatever it was), was a work of pure reason and was systematic accruing from its procedures, methodologies and codifications. Though it lacked formal academic learning as in modern curriculum of philosophy, this does not deny its existence and effectiveness as it solved of the problems of the ancient Egypt even if it is not a professional academic philosophy.

***Barnabas Ekeigini Izege**

Doctoral Student, Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: bizege@ yahoo.com

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