

**A CONTEMPORARY REACTION TO THE WESTERN CRITIQUE ON
ETHNOPHILOSOPHY AND HOUNTONDJI'S POSITION ON AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY**

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Abstract

The clash in positions of the universalist and the particularist schools of African philosophy are to a great extent determined by the degree to which the foundation of a philosopher is been globalized. This is seen in the fact that most philosophers who did their philosophical studies outside the circle of the circumference of Africa advocate for a universalist school of Philosophy. Thus, as the world globalizes and is globalized, this paper considers the relevance of a global philosophy behind the meaning and nature of African philosophy. The purpose of this, is to make a critical analysis on the contemporary's reaction, of the western critique of ethnophilosophy and the general position of doing African philosophy, which will then fostered Hountondji's vibrant discussion on the methods, scope, and standing of philosophy in the African context. The chapter resumes the main elements of this debate, which including the topic of who philosophizes (the individual or a collective), of the question of morality versus textuality of philosophical praxis, the nature of science, and the role of popular philosophical knowledge in academia. In conclusion, this paper will be considering the ambivalent character of ethnophilosophy in the face of its emergence, in contemporary scholarship in Africa, which points up on the social character of African philosophy and interest in doing philosophy.

Keywords: *African philosophy, Ethnophilosophy, Collective reasoning, Orality, Contemporary scholarship, Popular knowledge*

Introduction

Many researchers argue that the definition of philosophy is a perennial problem and there is little agreement as to what philosophy is. Rather, what many seem to agree on the descriptions of philosophy, is excluding the essence of what it encompasses which will provide the basis for our definition as a discipline. In the same vein, it has been difficult to define what African philosophy is rather most contemporary philosophers have contented themselves in describing what African philosophy is rather than defending the existence of African Philosophy as a discipline. According to Sogolo, "the controversy over what constitutes an African philosophy tends to dominate the cloud of the question of philosophy sometimes so much that it forms almost the entire content of the course" (9).

This paper is an attempt to explicate what African philosophy is, despite the unending polemics in the sphere and practice of African philosophy in a world dominated by the Western ideology. In doing this, we shall first start by attempting to describe what philosophy is, and possibly define the direction of philosophy. Subsequently, we shall be in a position to define African philosophy by looking at the origin of the debate on African philosophy which springs

out as a result of the charge of irrationality leveled against the African. Let us recall that many European scholars mostly anthropologists and sociologists in the like of E. Durkheim, Auguste Comte, James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Malinowski, Max Muller, Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor and even Levy Bruhl, have attempted to give an answer to what the African traditional world views were through their theories on religions of the primitive people. For instance, Levy Bruhl and Hegel rejected the rationality of the primitive people and claimed that they were largely pre-logical and that what their practices point to is a kind of symbolism.

We reject the postulations of these scholars, which were largely anthropological, psychological and sociological as the philosophy of the primitive people or Africans. In the same vein any attempt by contemporary African philosophers to present a purely descriptive, conjectural account of the African worldview as African philosophy will also be rejected. We conclude that African philosophy consists in speculative, conceptual and analytical as well as the critical examination of the African traditional thought in the light of contemporary global events.

The Nature of the Western Philosophy

Philosophy is from two Greek words: (*philo*) meaning *love* and (*sophia*) meaning *wisdom*. Brought together, it means the love of wisdom. The concept is a neologism attributed to Pythagoras. Thus, he presents philosophy as a high and supreme achievement of man, and philosophers as aspirants to or proponents of wisdom. According to Maziarz he argued that “In this relatively strict sense, philosophy implies both the process of questioning and the results of this interrogation as embodied in a personal or public enterprise of value to mankind” (13). As an academic discipline, philosophy exercises the principles of reason and logic its logic is an attempt to understand reality and answer some of the fundamental questions about the cosmos, essence of being, aesthetics and ontology. Thus, Teichmann & Katherine define Philosophy as “A study of problems which are ultimate, abstract and very general, these problems are concerned with the nature of existence, knowledge, morality, reason and human purpose” (p. 1).

Quinton corroborates with Teichmann and Katherine when he avers that:

Philosophy is rationally critical thinking, of a more or less systematic kind about the general nature of the world (metaphysics or theory of existence), the justification of belief (epistemology or theory of knowledge), and the conduct of life ethics or theory of value (95).

Thus, in Quinton's observation, each of the three elements in this list has a non-philosophical counterpart, from which it is distinguished by its explicitly rational and critical way of proceeding and by its systematic nature. Everyone has some general conception of the nature of the world in which they live and of their place in it. Metaphysics replaces the un-argued assumptions embodied in such a conception with a rational and organized body of beliefs about the universe as a whole. Everyone has occasion to doubt and question beliefs, their own or those of others, with more or less success and without any theory of what they are doing. Epistemology seeks by argument to make explicit the rules of correct belief formation. Everyone governs their conduct by directing it to desired or valued ends. Ethics, or moral philosophy, in its most inclusive sense, seeks to articulate, in rationally systematic form, the rules or principles involved. With Quinton's definition of philosophy, which brings out its metaphysical, epistemological and ethical dimensions, obviously exposed the fact that philosophy could be defined from a variety of perspectives. This is evident in the historical evolution of philosophy. For the Ionian School of Philosophy, philosophy

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would be nothing more than asking and offering rational explanations of the universe. For the sophists, it would be questioning the foundations of traditional religion, morality and the gods from a subjective perspective. In Socrates, philosophy is acquiring knowledge through questions and answers; thus, would involve a process of asking questions and questioning answers until answers are unquestionable and questions unanswerable. For the Cynics and Cyreniacs, who exaggerated Socrates teachings, philosophy would be a path to self-knowledge and self-sufficiency. Patristic and Early Medieval philosophers would understand philosophy as the handmaid of theology: an instrument for clarifying theological concepts. Descartes would understand philosophy as a search for the certainty of knowledge, this notwithstanding that the primary purpose for enquiry in philosophy. Thus, according to Grayling philosophy is an insight into reality. He argues that “the aim of philosophical inquiry is to gain insight into questions about knowledge, truth, reason, reality, meaning, mind, and value” (1). These questions are related to concrete circumstances. Thus, even though philosophy is general and abstract, it also relates to concrete circumstances as it enables people to understand the issues at stake on the political, economic, social, ethical, religious etc concrete circumstances of life, and thereby contribute to changing the world. Hountondji’s Critique of Ethnophilosophy

For us to have a better understanding of Hountondji’s critique of ethnophilosophy, it is good to explicate the term ethnophilosophy itself. To it we now turn. Ethnophilosophy etymologically, is driven from two Greek words; “ethnos” and “philosophia”. *Ethnos* which means, of or involving a nation, tribe, ethnic group, or race that share common cultural patrimony, while *philosophia* in the other hand implies a critical search for knowledge or wisdom about the nature and form of the universe, which include the interaction that existed between man and force.

In this sense, it will be of great interest to argue that ethnophilosophy simply means the search and quest for a universal knowledge of the ontology of man and his ethnic group. It is imperative to highlight that: “the search has to do with the interpretation of proverbs, folklores, myths, legends, religions, and traditions of an ethnic group” (Obi 2017, 116). In other words, it is a reflection on the worldviews of particular people, their cultures, ethical and political interactions. As this paper will put it, there are other names which are used to designate ethnophilosophy. Those names include the following; collective philosophy, folk philosophy, people philosophy, culture philosophy, ethno philosophy.

It should be noted that ethnophilosophy was neither invented nor coined by its proponents. In fact, Paulin Hountondji following his interaction with the subject matters, popularized the word when he used it in the early 1970s to refer to certain literatures concerning African philosophy. In his interaction with the term, Hountondji then made it precisely in his book, titled *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, that he used the term to refer to Placid Tempels’ Bantu Philosophy as mere ethnological work. Hence, Hountondji argues that:

This Belgian missionary’s Bantu Philosophy still passes today, in the eyes of some, for a classic of ‘African philosophy’. In fact, it is an ethnological work with philosophical pretensions, or more simply, if I may coin the word, a work of ‘ethnophilosophy (Hountondji 2004, 34).

Thus, since then, ethnophilosophy has been regarded as collective worldviews of African people seen as philosophy. Furthermore, in a public remark, Hountondji remarked that he was not the original inventor of the word, ethnophilosophy. Which implies that it already existed in the 1940s.

Hountondji thus, traced its origin to the autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah. In his autobiography, Kwame Nkrumah mentioned that he registered for PhD in ‘ethnophilosophy’. According to Hountondji:

Ethnophilosophy could be “the name of a subject ... in academia.” Making allusion to ethnobotany and ethnozoology, he suggested that ethnophilosophy appeared to be the study of the most general ideas and views in certain cultures (Obi 217, 45).

The proponents of ethnophilosophy attempted to present African collective worldview as philosophy. This is the reason why the likes of Tempels, Kagame, Lumunba, Mbiti, Mansolo and many others in the field of professional philosophy have been classified as ethnophilosophers. This is because, they are of the opinion that people’s worldview is their philosophy.

Furthermore, Hountondji remarked that he was not the original inventor of the word, ethnophilosophy. It already existed in the 1940s. He thus traced its origin to the autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah. In his autobiography, Kwame Nkrumah mentioned that he registered for PhD in ‘ethnophilosophy’. According to Hountondji, ethnophilosophy could be “the name of a subject ... in academia.” (Hountondji 2004, 1) Making allusion to ethnobotany and ethnozoology, he suggested that ethnophilosophy appeared to be the study of the most general ideas and views in certain cultures. The proponents of ethnophilosophy attempted to present African collective worldview as philosophy.

Africa and African Philosophy

Africa provides the *locus* or *locale* for doing the philosophy called African. It is in this regard that the analysis of the concept Africa is of great importance in stressing the lines of reality Achen argues that:

The origin of the concept *Africa* depicts its geographical setting. *Africa* is of Phoenician origin and it was first used by the Romans to refer to the territory about the city of Carthage, people with uniqueness and unbroken spirit (Achen 1913, 13).

However, in supporting Achebe’s position, Anyanwu opines that:

Africa is used to denote the land of sunshine, the root of the black race and mostly refers to the sub-Saharan regions of the Negroes. Without any reservations, the etymology of the conception of Africa as the name implies can be traced to the Latin adjective “aprica”, which means sunny (Anyanwu 1977, 11).

This notwithstanding, in this piece, the idea of Africa encompasses the territory about the city of Carthage and the sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, Kanu I.A is of the view that Africa is the second largest of the Earth’s seven continents, covering 30,244,000 sq km (11,677,000 sq mi), including its adjacent islands with 54 countries. Okere (2005, 14) observes that it encompasses 23 percent of the world’s total land area. In 2000 some 13 percent of the world’s population, an estimated 797 million people, lived in Africa, making it the world’s second most populous continent, after Asia. (Oguejiofor J. Obi et al 2019, 16), state that the people inhabiting Africa are divided into more than 1,000 ethnic groups, with different languages, social customs, religions and way of life. Thus, following the above assertions, Imbo articulated from the point of the geo-numerical identity of Africa and argued that:

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Africa as the second world largest continent, it covers an area estimated 11, 617, 000 square miles. It is three times the size of Europe (10, 400, 000 squarekilometres and 4,000, 000 square miles) and contains about four hundred million inhabitants. Africa is divided into twenty-five major ethnic groups speaking about seven hundred languages. It contains within it every known type of topography and climatic condition, except the Arctic cold. There are in the North the Sahara, and in the South the Kalahari Desert, with permanent snow fall in the Kilmanjaro, also found in Africa are jungle areas, temperate zones, swamps and Savannah. Finally, some of the highest falls and longest rivers in the world- the Nile, Niger, Zaire (now Congo), and Zambesi rives- are also found in Africa. (Imbo 1998, 16).

From Imbo position on the geo-numerical designation of Africa, one can point a finger to a place, or even on the world map and say this is Africa, and likewise identifies a particular language to be an indigenous African language. With the above points, one can call a person from this said geographical located area as an African.

In disagreement to Imbo's position; However, Alwin argues that "the question of who is an African goes beyond mere geographical location or designation" (Alwin 1978, 20). This is because, there are so many people in the African continent who are not Africans, as there are many African in diasporas who do not accept that they are Africans. As such, a single characteristic such as color, ancestry origin or geography location does not settle the question of who or what is an African? Be that as it may, it does provide an insight into what or who an African is, but still makes difficult the question of which ideas are to be regarded as African philosophy.

Towards a Definition of African Philosophy

Following from the above, one seems to be in a vantage position at answering our initial question: "what is African philosophy?" which is the main task of this paper. It is true that there are as many definitions of philosophy but it is possible, according to Staniland, to say that it is the critical examination of the ideas which men live by. In the same vein, it is a difficult task to give an accurate or faultless definition to African philosophy. However, be that as it may, we can recognize some essential ingredients about what philosophy is. For anything to be philosophical it has to do with the reflection on the experience of a society, group or an individual.

This reflection has been necessitated by wonders about some compelling problems of life and existence. Another essential ingredient is that such reflection must be critical and logical. As long as anybody or group meets these requirements such a person or group can be said to engage in what is called philosophy. To that extent, for anything to qualify as African philosophy, it must meet the requirements stipulated above. Hence, we submit that what African philosophy is, involves the application of the above categories of conceptual analysis, logic, criticism and synthesis to the reflections on issues that are of paramount importance to the African needs and ways of life. African in this context is not based exclusively on geographical congruity, but also on certain shared values among Africans.

Foundational Factor of African Philosophy

The question of whether there is an African philosophy or not was largely born out of the popular Western portrayal of Africa in books by ethnologists and historians. They popularized the

face of an Africa to be savages, who could do nothing, develop nothing or create nothing, even her own historical makeup. The bastardized image of Africa raised the question as to if the people as described could develop a philosophy of their own. Thus, (Bodunrin 1984, 23) observes that for centuries, there was a systematic and ruthless attempt to deny Africa the fundamental human right of self-determination and self-identity, if denied access to self-philosophy. The *Black Consciousness Movement* in Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, South America, and throughout the Pan-African world was a reaction and an attempt towards reaffirming the African thought system, African identity and Africa as a continent.

Response to Eurocentric Views on the African Conception of Reality

The attempts at answering the Europeans of the charge that the Africans were irrational by some of the scholars discussed above constituted the motive force for the propagation of all sorts of beliefs and ideologies as African philosophy. These attempts are glaring in the works of Mbiti in his work titled *African Religious and Philosophy* and also in Tempel's book titled *Bantu Philosophy*.

The attempts by the anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists stated above do not in any way constitute the philosophy of the people they studied due to most of the shortcomings of such theories. Hence, any attempt by African scholars, African philosophers or any philosophers for that matter to present this kind of African world-view as constituting African philosophy will be anything but African philosophy. The above is what philosophy and African philosophy are not and cannot be. Edeh is of the opinion that: "Since philosophy is not a science, philosophers are not out to prove things true or false. Novel speculation, cogent argumentation and conceptual analysis are the centers of interest of philosophers" (Edeh 1985, 44).

The most one can require is the fact that for speculation be empirically relevant, it must first offer in a new perspective on the human situation and the realities it confronts. Philosophy has its own world-views and if one is to relate traditional thought systems in terms of how African thoughts differ from or resemble the dominant world view in western philosophy at the moment, and then we are confronted with the situation of throwing away the baby out with the bath water. Thus, Edeh states further that:

The world-view that prevails in much of academic philosophy today is a particular virulent and dogmatic form of empiricism. It is an empiricism that can be traced to the ever-increasing cultural predominance of contemporary science which has, in effect, exploited philosophy in the hope that it would produce suitably scientific ideology and has led to a formidable series of recent 'schools', such as logical positivism, logical empiricism, ordinary language philosophy and even conceptual analysis (Edeh 1984, 45).

For one contriving preoccupation throughout has been that any term used to describe reality must either stand or fall purely on the level of 'empirical experience'. For Hallen therefore, emphasize that contemporary analytic techniques are neither timeless nor a cultural. Thus, Edeh also concluded that:

The fact that they can afford interesting insights and comparisons is not sufficient reason to stop there. Other speculative, critical elements and standards of

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verification should be of equal importance if analysis (and philosophy) is itself to evolve, progress and perhaps even metamorphose. It cannot be contested that non-western cultures have a significant contribution to make in this regard (Edeh 1984, 67).

In following the treads above, Bodunrin argued that “what philosophical arguments do is to compel us to make a choice since we cannot live with inconsistent beliefs” (Bodunrin 1984, 34). On African philosophy, extra philosophical considerations account for the divergent views which African philosophers hold. These considerations all have something to do with anti-colonialist and post-colonialist intellectual liberation.

Thus, Bodunrin (1984, 34) distinguishes a particular group of African philosophers who has argued on what African philosophy is. This group according to him is known as the traditionalists, who emphasize the present in relation to the past. Their concern is the discovery of authentic African ideas and thought systems uninfluenced by alien accretions. This group thinks that the crisis of identity in which Africa is enmeshed is because of the fact that Africa has lost its roots. The materials of this group include African myth, folklore, social organization and oral literature and culture. This group, according to Bodunrin argued that: “Had hitherto been referred to as ethno-philosophers but the name has been dropped because of its pejorative connotation and for the fact that this group now carries out its discussion with greater analytic rigour and less dogmatism than previously” (Bodunrin 1984, 56).

Colonialism and the Exploitation of Africa

Since Africans were regarded as sub-humans and people with little rational arsenal, the western ideology of colonialism became a forceful gospel of redemption and elevation of the black manto some western human status. (Okere 2005, 66), argued that “Before 1830 European settlements were for the most part restricted to small coastal trading stations”. Both physical and economic factors combined to retard penetration. However, during the mid-19th Century, (Wiredu 1990, 319), observes that “European Explorers began to make significant advances into tropical Africa”. As a result, the great puzzles of African geography for Europeans notably the course of the Nile, Niger, Congo and Zambezi rivers were solved within the space of half a century. Missionaries took an increasing part in extending European interests.

All this exploration and evangelism frequently led to trade. Yet it soon realized that profitable trade depended on maintenance of peace and that this peace could not be assured without administrative intervention and control in the hinterlands. Wiredu holds that: “Because the explorers came from several different European countries Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, Belgium and Germany Africa soon became a field for the conflicting ambitions of the major European Colonial Powers” (Wiredu 1990, 82). It could be argued that by the early 1880’s these conflicting ambitions were beginning to be expressed territorially. Sections of the coast were being claimed by traders and administrators of one or other of the European powers. Missionary, trading, military and administrative activities were beginning to expand. In the contention of Hodder, the stage was now set for the European scramble for Africa, finally to be set in motion by the 1884-5 Conference and Treaty of Berlin. According to Walter:

The decisive effect of colonialism is that fact that one’s power of self- determination was taken away from the other, and by that loss one society is forced into

underdevelopment. The idea of African Philosophy was an attempt, among so many other attempts, to reaffirm our heritage and personality collapsing before Western bias. Africans wanted to accept and define their responsibility to assess the riches and promise of their culture and also to open dialogue with the West. As part of the process of self-affirmation and identification, a college of intellectuals created images to project the African identity. And a cursory glance at the thought system of Africans, reveal that they can and do have a philosophy (Gyekye 1987, 82).

Thus, following the above argument Uduigwomen, maintain that the debate or controversy on whether or not there is an African philosophy is dead and buried. At best, it is only as a matter of historical interest that it is considered. This is obvious, taking from the fact that the subject African philosophy is presently being taught either as a self-subsisting course or part of comparative philosophy in many African universities, and even overseas. A number of thesis and articles have been written on this subject by a retinue of both graduate and post-graduate students, conferences are organized all over the world on African philosophy, having their inspiration sparked off by scholars who stand at the base of the history of African Philosophy.

The Notion of Ideological and Race Classification

The 19th century was the apex of racism par excellence. It was a season when theories and ideas about the nature of the human person were at cross-roads. Charles Darwin produced his theory on the “origin of species by natural selection” in which he stated that from all variations of life found in the world, nature selects certain of them for survival while others are marked for extinction. drawing from the impact of the Darwinian racial ideology, (Bujo 1992, 33) insists that evolutionary thought is the alleged rationale for the many evils and harmful practices of the 19th and 21st centuries done of the African person.

It swept through Germany in the 20th century and sowed in it one of the most heinous manifestations of racism in human history, culminating in the crematoria of death camps in the 1940's and also through Africa, giving rise to the most widespread, enduring and virulent form of racism without first understanding the essence of philosophy. This according to (Masolo 1994, 74), was based on cultural bias, expressed and intensified in the writings of Western scholars on the existence of rationality among the African person. Thus, writing in the 18th century, stated that:

All creatures were arranged by God in a great chain of hierarchy with human beings at the head. He further indicated that human beings have their own hierarchy of being, with the black race closest to the lowest animals and should not be deemed fit for any rational ability for a self-philosophy (Bujo 1992, 58).

In this hierarchy, the white race occupied the highest position and as such the superior race. The *Americanus* were considered as tenacious, contented, free and ruled by custom. The *Europeaus*, he says are light, lively, and inventive and ruled by rites. The *Asiaticus* are stern, haughty, stingy and ruled by opinion. *Africans* are cunning, slow, negligent and ruled by caprice. Like Bujo stress that in the 20th century, also developed a biased anthropology.

He placed human beings on a hierarchy with Africa at the bottom. He argued that Europe had attained civilization while others are yet to. Following the same line of thought, Hume cited by

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Okere, “I am apt to suspect that the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of neither that complexion, nor even an individual eminent in action or speculation” (Okere 2005, 241). Hegel also had a biased perception of the Negro. As Egbunu wrote, that:

In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained to the realisation of any substantial existence. Thus distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained. (Egbunu 2001, 93).

Eurocentric Conception of African Conception of Reality

There were various attempts to engage in the interpretation of African ontology or world-views by European scholars mostly anthropologists. According to Pritchard, Okere argues that:

These theories are no more than plausible and even, as they have been propounded, unacceptable in that they contain contradictions and logical inadequacies, or in that they cannot be observed or proved either true or false and because, ethnographic evidence invalidates them (Okere 2005, 5).

Max Muller in his own interpretation believes that things that are intangible like sun and the sky gave men the idea of the infinite and also furnished the material for deities. He did not wish to be understood as suggesting that metaphysics of religion for example began by men deifying grand natural objects, but rather these gave him a feeling of the infinite and also served as symbols for it. Aja just like Muller was chiefly interested in African understanding of Being than that of the western classical world, though he tried his hands at the interpretations of some natural material and certainly believed that his explanations had general validity.

Okere's opinion was that the infinite, once the idea had arisen from the African point of view one could only be thought of in metaphor and symbol which could be taken from what seemed majestic in the known world, such as the heavenly bodies or rather their attributes of being to existence. But these attributes then lost their original metaphorical sense and achieved autonomy by becoming personified as deities in their own right. So, the metaphysics might be described as a ‘disease of language’, a pithy but unfortunate expression. To him the only way one can discover the meaning of the ontology of the early man, is first understanding the philosophical and etymological understanding of the people and how reality exposes itself to them.

Thus, Spencer in supporting the above view is of the argument that “the primitive man is rational and given his small knowledge, his influences are reasonable, if weak” (94). This according to him is because the primitive people had no idea of nature and the ability to analysis of any natural explanation as though they could have conducted their various practical pursuits without any external assistance. Obi also argued that:

In Africa dreams, are real experiences to peoples reality, which chiefly gave them the inept idea of their own existence, their dual conception of reality and their conception of self which wanders at night with the shadow-self which appears by day as manifestation of being (Obi 2008, 328-339).

African idea of duality is fortified by experiences of various forms of temporary insensibility, sleeping, swooning, catalepsy and the like, so that death itself comes to be thought of as only a prolonged form of insensibility which forms every part of their reality.

Durkheim in his sociological theory believes that Africans from their religious conception, bond always in groups, for them existence is a collective affair and that no person is an island of himself. Arguing from the point of What Levy Bruhl, means by prelogical, a logical or anti-logical in the face of identifying reality. Prelogical here is applied to primitive mentality, means simply that it does not go out of its way as the Europeans do, to avoid contradiction. Grayling (1998, 62) was described as being too subtle, for he means by 'pre-logical' little more than unscientific or uncritical, that primitive man is rational but unscientific or uncritical. Max Weber characterized societies into three viz the rational, traditional and charismatic. He described the primitive society as a traditional one which is characterized by piety for what has always existed typical of conservative and relatively changeless societies in which effective or effectual, sentiments predominate. Accordingly, Grayling opines that:

It is a remarkable fact that none of the anthropologists whose theories about the Africans as primitive people have been most influential. They consequently had to rely for their information on what European explorers, missionaries, administrators and traders told them be for hand and make their conclusions without any rational proof (Grayling 1998, 53).

Also, there was the problem of language and interpretation. Their reports were inadequate and highly selective. Pritchard here believes that statements about a people's worldview must always be treated with the greatest caution. For the scholars are then dealing with what neither European nor native can directly observe, with conceptions, images, words which require for understanding a thorough knowledge of a people's language, life style, worldview and also an awareness of the entire system of life philosophy which any particular belief is built upon as part of its structure, since it may be meaningless when divorced from the set of beliefs and practices to which it belongs.

Conclusion

Philosophy assumes man to be a rational agent who can distinguish between that which is good and bad, useful or otherwise. Therefore, the pre-occupation of philosophers in doing African philosophy must be relevant to the improvement of the Africans in their worldly outlook. In this regard, African philosophy is an attempt by philosophers to make the folklores, myth, sooth sayings, religion, education, socio political organizations and other aspects of the African culture relevant to African needs not through any dogmatic attachment to standards used in evaluating the African culture in itself, but through creative critical in African worldview, examination and logical methodologies which are not peculiar to the Western culture.

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