

**A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE**

**DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY**

**BY**

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# A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

A Dissertation submitted to the Board of Graduate School, Egerton University in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in Philosophy.

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October, 1996.

## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Evelyne Muchocho, declare that this study is my own work and it has not been presented, wholly or in parts for another award or fellowship to the Board of Graduate School or any other institutions.

Evelyne Muchocho

Signed

**Evelyne Muchocho.**

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## DEDICATION

I am indebted  
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With great and special love, I dedicate this work to my parents, Zebedee and Alice Muchocho, for being keen about every step taken and decision made in the course of my study. You have been such a wonderful source of inspiration and encouragement towards my achievement.

Dr. J. M.  
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## ABSTRACT

The debate on what African Philosophy is, or is not, has repeatedly engaged Philosophers for many years now, oblivious of the changes taking place in the World today. This explains its slow progress and a misunderstanding of its goal and purpose.

This study has examined factors responsible for this situation, and has identified some of them as, lack of an adequate definition and methodology. For purposes of clarification, the study has distinguished between the narrower and broader meaning of the term Philosophy.

This study has also made a critical exposition of key methods in any philosophical venture namely, the scientific, critical and comparative methods. In this respect, we have learnt that, without a proper understanding of a subject's conceptual cognition, and methodology, it becomes difficult for it to respond to the challenges encountered; and this endangers its own survival.

To achieve this end, this study recommends that, African Philosophy must have as its goal, the enhancement of the intellectual activity. It ought to be forward-looking, cultivating independence of thought through critical and rational analysis. It ought to accept and encourage the process of change, so as to attain new and broader ways of looking at reality, rather than, resting on a set of theoretical assumptions, or ideas about people and the universe.

From the foregoing, this study comes to the conclusion that, African Philosophy should be a continuous process, giving new



direction to human thought. Life is dynamic and so are problems of human existence, hence the past and present ought to be critically studied for scholars to learn useful lessons from them, and be able to forge out into the future.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Statement of the problem:

African Philosophy has not been clearly articulated in terms of definition and methodology. The term as it were is compounded with vagueness and ambiguity, and this has led to a lot of confusion and misunderstandings about what African Philosophy is. The popular and narrower sense of the term has often been mixed up and used synonymously. As such, it has been difficult to draw a line of demarcation as concerns the discussion on African Philosophy. The question is, should it be limited to a given time-span or should it be a life-long quest for knowledge?

The lack of a clear-cut definition and methodology has taken its toll on African Philosophy and some issues have been raised which need scholarly approach. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to critically appraise the current state of contemporary African Philosophy, tackling especially the issues of a definition, methodology and their implications, and how they can be overcome.

Due to these confusions, a proper methodology has not been given and so African Philosophy stands as a discipline that does not really know what it wants, and where it is going. Given a working definition and methodology, African Philosophy will be able to set out its goals, demarcate boundaries of a proper discussion and speak itself into existence. This will also determine the kinds of issues and questions raised in African Philosophy.

## **1.2 Hypothesis:**

Reading through the works of some philosophers, African Philosophy has been portrayed as a discipline that rests on confusions and misconceptions concerning its essence, its location and how it can be researched on. No one scholar or philosopher seems to know exactly what African Philosophy entails, what its objectives are, and this has been a major drawback. It is against this background that this study has resolved the hypothesis that, "African Philosophy can only be articulated clearly, if it establishes a working definition and methodology, to resolve issues that emerge within it, and determine the kinds of questions raised within its scope."

## **1.3 Objectives of Study:**

This study is set to achieve the following objectives;

1. To make a distinction between the two senses of the term African Philosophy as popular and technical and their implications. This aims at eliminating the confusion and misunderstandings which center on the ambiguity and vagueness that characterize the term.
2. To give a proper methodology for African Philosophy and its implicit implications and; to examine the nature of philosophical problems and how they determine the scope or subject matter of African Philosophy.

## **1.4 Justification of study:**

Lack of a clear-cut definition and methodology has been a draw-back to the development of African Philosophy. More often, than not, philosophers have been struggling with the same issues

over and over again, at the expense of real life situations that paint themselves on the horizon.

The question of Ethno-philosophy is long over due and other problems need to be considered. It is a high time scholars of African Philosophy are awakened from their apologetic slumber of trying to prove to the Western world that they are rational and that they had a Philosophy.

What ails the discipline is lack of a working definition and methodology, but, once these are established, African Philosophy like any science will make long strides of progress in terms of generating philosophical knowledge that can illuminate the whole of philosophy.

This study is, therefore, justified in as far as it seeks to understand and clarify these major issues that have been the cause of misunderstanding among many scholars. It is also justified in as far as, it attempts to stretch rather than reinforce the boundaries that currently define African Philosophy.

### **2.5 Research Methodology:**

The method of philosophical analysis has been adopted in analyzing the data. This method entails critical and logical analysis of terms, theories, concepts and statements to determine their meanings and contextual definitions. This method also falls under the analytic tradition of the 20th century and has some of its proponents scholars such as, L. Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, Rudolf Carnap, G.E Moore, A. J Ayer and G. Ryle.

By critically analyzing concepts, statements, sentences and theories to determine their meanings and senses, one can be able

to rid them of border-line vagueness and ambiguity hence make them more clear and well understood. This will not only result in the clarification of the structure of reality and language but will also expose the philosophical absurdities that rest on inadequate conceptions of language or concepts. According to Wittgenstein, "the task of analysis is to make every statement an adequate picture of the reality it describes. A robust sense of reality is important in framing a correct analysis of propositions".<sup>1</sup>

The method of logical analysis is therefore critical, objective and subjective. This gives it the quality of being partial and checks against prejudice. Both objectivity and subjectivity allow for generalizations and comparison of different worldviews or concepts, thereby enlarging one's conception of the world. The method of Philosophical analysis, is therefore, vital in this study as it has dealt with literature and thought from the pre-scientific age to the present.

Data collected from professional philosophers and students of philosophy on the subject of definition, methodology and content has also been analyzed using this method. Brain storming discussions with sages on fundamental issues that affect man have also been subjected to this method in an effort to guard against prejudice.

## **2.6 Literature Review**

Since this study is a critical Appraisal of African Philosophy, the author mainly considered works on and about

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<sup>1</sup> L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico Philosophicus, London, 1922, p.35.

African Philosophy. She has concentrated on the main issues as outlined in the statement of the problem, namely, the problem of definition, methodology and content. It should be pointed out that other works out of the scope of African Philosophy and which are relevant to this study have also been considered.

The question of whether, there is an African Philosophy, has caused a lot of confusion among philosophers. There is a disagreement about offering a clear-cut definition of the expression, African Philosophy. This is perhaps brought about by the ambiguity and vagueness of both terms. J. M. Nyasani shows it clearly when he observes that:

the concept of African Philosophy is both vague and ambiguous. It is ambiguous in the sense that it may be applied to aspects of reality that are quite far apart and even contrasting; and vague in the sense that the limits of the applicability of the term may not be clear.<sup>2</sup>

P. Hountondji attempts a conceptualization of the term Africa, in an effort to rid it of its vagueness and ambiguity. He has it thus "Africa is above all a continent, and, the concept of Africa an empirical, geographical and not a metaphysical one".<sup>3</sup>

Hountondji's projection is such that, the term can apply to those people living on the continent, and it is not an abstraction, it refers to a reality that can be experienced. In this connection, African Philosophy, then, becomes the philosophy of the continent either as a way of life or an academic subject.

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<sup>2</sup> J. M. Nyasani, (Ed.), Philosophical Focus on Culture and Traditional Thought Systems in Development, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1994, p.31.

<sup>3</sup> P. J. Hountondji, African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983, p. 66.

This helps one to understand, why Hountondji defines philosophy as a set of texts written by Africans themselves and described as philosophical by their authors.<sup>4</sup>

This carries the implication that unless one is of the African origin, he cannot produce work that rightly deserves a place in African Philosophy. This poses a serious problem for African Philosophy as an academic discipline, as those outside the field will be excluded. Knowledge is here limited to the geographical origin or the author rather than the alleged specificity of content.

Such a stand is too subjective, and therefore, self-defeating. The thinking process cannot be limited as this betrays the power of reason and the value of knowledge. Reason is a universal human trait, hence knowledge cannot be a monopoly of a certain continent or group of people.

Hountondji's projection or definition can be reformulated in such a way that, it is not wholly exclusive, so as, to include aliens who have lived in the Continent, and who understand the African problematic.

H. Oruka's insight on this is worth noting. He says that, "there is no good reason to say that African Philosophy is or can be a product of native Africans. Any one who has lived and worked in Africa and developed philosophical interest in certain problems within an African culture or society can produce a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.33.

philosophical work that rightly deserves the adjective "African".

Hence, African Philosophy should be defined in a sense in which it does not mean that only Africans are, and can be capable of a philosophy of this kind. Work by those in the field and those outside the field should be treated equally, provided both are dealing with the thought of the people in question.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the term African Philosophy is clustered with ambiguity and vagueness. It therefore needs a fleshing out to eliminate them. The term needs to be as definitely delimited as possible, so as, to reduce all border-zone vagueness to a minimum. In this way, the relationship between the different meanings of the concept will be clarified; and also the limitations and applicability of the term will be made clear.

It is in this perspective that a distinction is made between the two senses of the term. This distinction is important to clarify the misunderstanding between philosophers as concerns the broad and specific meaning of the term African Philosophy. The term enlists both the popular (ideological) and theoretical (strict) meaning.

This study will examine the two meanings as outlined by different philosophers in the following paragraphs. Philosophy in its popular or ideological sense refers to a way of life, that is, how people in any given area organize and lead their lives. According to Nyasani, "African Philosophy as a way of life

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<sup>5</sup> H. O. Oruka, Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy, Nairobi, Shirikon Publishers, 1990, p.149.



originates from a consciousness summoned to adapt itself to a universe which has become alien, and unusual".<sup>6</sup>

In short, this explains how any given community responds and approaches reality, by making sense of the experience they go through. Human beings try to find meaningful ways of adjusting to their environment and living in harmony with it. This kind of philosophy entails practical and traditional wisdom.

For Hountondji, "philosophy as popular or way of life, is any kind of wisdom collective or individual, any set of principles presenting some degree of coherence intended to govern the daily practice of a man or a people".<sup>7</sup>

In this vulgar sense of the word, everyone is naturally a philosopher and so is every society. This is what comprises a collective philosophy or way of looking at things; whereby ideas of law, love, government, God and the good are handed down from one generation to another by parents, peers, elders or the church. These ideas get disseminated in society and later become a peoples' way of life, or what is commonly referred to as the common mind. Such ideas are taken wholesale by society or individuals without reflecting on them or questioning them.

In its strict sense, however, Philosophy begins with reflection, when an individual is dissatisfied with the normal explanation of things and wants to go deeper to establish the underlying principles that necessitate such an explanation.

According to J. Mbae, philosophy of this kind occurs when an individual goes to work on the collective culture, retrieving

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<sup>6</sup> J. M. Nyasani, Philosophical Focus On Culture, p.35.

<sup>7</sup> Hountondji, African Philosophy, p.47.

in questioning it, giving it a new meaning and interpretation.<sup>8</sup> It is in this connection perhaps that Hountondji argues that, one is more spontaneously a philosopher than one is spontaneously a chemist, physicist or a mathematician.<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, Philosophy becomes an individual effort and not a collective activity. It comprises of reflections of an individual or individuals on certain philosophical problems and issues on the form of specialization.

In Ewasi Wiredu's works, Philosophy and An African Culture, Philosophy in its strict sense is devoted to detailed and complicated argument.<sup>10</sup> Philosophy characterized as such, becomes distinct from Philosophy in its popular sense. Philosophy as theoretical becomes a conceptual activity. This is explained by P. Bodunrin when he says that: "Philosophical claims are knowledge claims, but whatever knowledge of the world philosophers can lay claims to is attained primarily by conceptual reasoning".<sup>11</sup>

This simply means that philosophers employ abstractions or concepts and by means of these try to formulate laws and principles which transcend particular instances or situations.

The above views as expressed by different philosophers were long recognized by C. S. Pierce. According to him, the

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Philosophy: History

<sup>8</sup> J. G. Mbae, "Is there an African Philosophy," in J. M. Oyasani, p. 428.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., African Philosophy, p.47.

<sup>10</sup> E. Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p.33.

<sup>11</sup> P. Bodunrin, "The Question of African Philosophy," in Philosophy 56, 1981, pp. 17-18.

development of a philosophy whether it is sophisticated or elementary, enduring or changeable, cannot be a task delegated to others.<sup>12</sup>

Philosophy, therefore, entails individual reflections and thus defeats the notion of the collective mind or philosophy. The collective mind looks at things superficially but the reflective mind involves a penetrating view of things. As such, Philosophy as an intellectual discipline or practice is different in kind from 'Weltanschauung' (worldview) and from ethnographic descriptions paraphrasing a tradition, its wisdom and its linguistic richness.<sup>13</sup>

It is in this background that the distinction between traditional African Philosophy and philosophy should be perceived or understood. Traditional African Philosophy as opposed to philosophy as an intellectual practice simply means; the worldview and more generally that of practical and traditional wisdom, rather than that of a systematically explicit and critical system of thought.

Philosophy should, therefore, be conceived in such a way that it does not imply the collective mentality, as has been the case in the past. This kind of misconception can be alleviated when one makes clear the sense in which he employs the term philosophy. Having stated the two senses of the term, it urgently becomes necessary to correct the common misconception that Greek

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<sup>12</sup> C. S. Pierce, "Four Approaches to Philosophy", in J. Bald, Classic Philosophical Questions, 3rd Ed., Columbus, Merril Publishing, 1979. p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa:- Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of knowledge, Indiana University Press, 1988, p.156.

philosophy is the thought of Greeks, that Chinese philosophy is the thought of Chinese, and that African philosophy is the thought of Africans, Mbae summarizes philosophy when he observes that:

what is often labelled as Greek Philosophy is no more than the reflections of an individual or individuals who happened to be of Greek origin. By Greek Philosophy we understand the reflections of Thales, Ionians, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Sextus and others.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, what is popularly called African Philosophy must not be the collective thought of Africans but the rational product of known individuals dealing with different aspects of the problematic in African Philosophy.

This line of argument echoes Wiredu when he contends that African Philosophy as distinct from traditional worldviews is the philosophy that is being produced by contemporary philosophers.<sup>15</sup>

Another aspect of African Philosophy that has engaged philosophers in a painstaking debate is the problem of methodology. They are at a loss as to what methods should be adopted in pursuit of African Philosophy, considering the fact that an African's orientation in Philosophy is different from his western counterpart in terms of the historical and environmental conditions.

The problem of methodology has been a major drawback to the development of African Philosophy, as it has engaged philosophers in what seems to be an endless debate. This issue

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<sup>14</sup> Mbae, in Nyasani, p. 430.

<sup>15</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.36.

needs to be put to rest to allow philosophers look elsewhere by tackling issues at hand. Historically speaking, philosophers have made use of a variety of procedures and there is no consensus as to what methods of investigation are proper to philosophy. However, this cannot undermine the importance of a methodology. A methodology is necessary if any discipline is to be clearly articulated.

Methodology can simply be defined as the procedure and aims of any given discipline and the way in which that discipline is organized.<sup>16</sup> This is what to a great extent determines the progress of any discipline and its relevance. Without an adequate procedure and objectives, the discipline collapses as it lacks sustainability and direction. Organization should be construed as coherence, such that, any discipline should exhibit a well-connected system of facts. H. Olela, points out the fact that methodology is essential as it determines the types of questions raised within the scope of any concern.<sup>17</sup>

Various methods have been floated as being essential to philosophy, namely the scientific, critical, and the comparative method. The scientific method is highly cherished.

Pierce in has argued that, the scientific approach is vital in establishing a philosophy; as it involves sound reasoning and painstaking observation that is used to establish the nature of

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<sup>16</sup> Encyclopedia Americana, "Man to Mysticism," Vol 17, Doubleday Ltd., 1979, p. 558.

<sup>17</sup> H. Olela, "Approaches to African Philosophy", Unpublished works, Egerton University, Njoro, p.20.

This method, enables one to distinguish the true from the false, and it alone can settle disagreements in belief.<sup>18</sup>

Similar sentiments are expressed by Wiredu when he observes that:

A philosopher should be aware of the scientific method of exactness and rigour in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and experimental approach so characteristic of science. These are attributes of mind which we in Africa need to cultivate because they are intellectual virtues in themselves and rapid conditions of modernization.<sup>19</sup>

The scientific method is an endearment to most philosophers due to its unending quest for truth. Its truth claims are to be held only until further notice. The method is therefore construed in such a way that it is flexible or rather, it is endowed with elasticity. Nothing is static, its knowledge claims can be altered in case of new discoveries that are nearer the truth. It entails the quality of fleshing in and fleshing out, and this has been responsible for the great strides science has made.

Alongside the scientific method, the method of critical analysis is also posited which is also important to philosophy. Wiredu writes:

- The student of philosophy ought to adopt a highly critical approach to his studies and as a corollary a comparative method, to see how far issues and concepts of universal relevance can be disentangled from the contingencies of culture.<sup>20</sup>

The critical method encourages open-mindedness or objectivity. The method is formulated in such a way that, it does

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<sup>18</sup> J. Gould, Classic Philosophical Questions, p.35.

<sup>19</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.33.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.31.

not allow for dogmatism. It questions the collective image, common sense and our worldview. This method further encourages intellectual independence, in that one is given the freedom to use his own reason.

However, intellectual independence does not mean the repudiation of all tradition, rather, one should critically assess the firmness of such traditions or beliefs to see whether they are rationally defensible. By so doing, one is freed from the bondage of dogmatism, prejudice and ignorance. Hence, nothing should be taken as the sole truth or for granted. Both sides of the coin have to be considered in order that one arrives at a proper conclusion. For Rudolf Carnap, "the function of critical analysis is to analyze away all knowledge, all assertions of science and of everyday life in order to make clear the sense of each assertion and the connection between them".<sup>21</sup>

As pointed out, the comparative method is also important to philosophy. It is geared towards identifying concepts and issues with universal relevance, in an effort to forge a universal philosophical cognition. The underlying character of the method has been outlined by T. Hasumi,

as research for universal and fundamental cognition of truth in philosophy, whether the subjects are oriental, occidental, ancient or modern. Truth in philosophy must be universal, but it may be expressed diversely. Diversity of philosophical expression in no way means multiplicity of truth, rather, it indicates the universal and fundamental character of truth related to such diversity.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Carnap, R., "Functions of Analysis," In Weitz, Morris, (Ed.), 20th Century Philosophy: The Analytic Tradition, N. York, Basic Press, 1966, p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> T. Hasumi, "Problems of Comparative Philosophy". In H. Inoue and D. A. Masolo, Philosophy & Culture, Bookwise Ltd., 1983, p. 119.

This method further enables scholars to understand and appreciate how different people deal with fundamental questions; realizing that truth can be approached from different angles.

R. A. Wright, expresses similar sentiments as concerns the comparative method. He says that, "we must try to understand diversity of thought, trying to place it in the context of the whole of philosophy; try to piece together the giant puzzle of human understanding."<sup>23</sup> As such, the exchange of ideas leads to intellectual growth.

Another issue that arises in African Philosophy is the question of orality and authorship. This is necessitated by the philosophical methodology as discussed above. Some philosophers have argued that authorship or writing and literacy are necessary conditions, if it is to be progressive.

Wiredu contends that, "Philosophy in the narrower sense must contain not just theses. Without argument and clarification, there is strictly no philosophy. Lack of discursiveness is a drawback."<sup>24</sup>

This carries the implication that philosophy cannot be a monopoly of one person. Any theory put forward must be discussed in order to determine its quality. Discursiveness and argument or debate will ensure the refinement of a people's belief systems and to establish their reliability.

The presence of debate stresses the social nature of the philosophical enterprise. African Philosophy as science must

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<sup>23</sup> R. A. Wright, African philosophy: An Introduction, University Press of America, 1977, p.29.

<sup>24</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.47.



small the quality of being intersubjective. This is one of the characteristics of the scientific method, as outlined by H. Feigl when he contends that, intersubjective testability implies that, knowledge claims are capable of confirmation and disconfirmation at least indirectly or to some degree on the part of any person properly equipped with intelligence and technical devices of observation or experimentation.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, Philosophical knowledge has to be subjected to detailed argument in order to ascertain their validity. Intersubjective testability checks against partiality, personal or cultural prejudice.

The issue of intersubjective testability presupposes writing and literacy. This is due to the fact that for ideas to be disseminated and studied, they have to be written. This poses another problem for African Philosophers, such that, they are not sure whether traditional African Philosophy can count as philosophy.

Hountondji for instance, is associated with the remark that, "philosophy cannot develop fully unless it writes its memoir or keeps a diary"<sup>26</sup> In this sense, philosophy cannot escape the requirement that it must be written. Unless it is written, how can it demonstrate its existence? How can scholars judge that this or that piece of work is philosophical unless they are able to read and study it.

Writing gives philosophy its progressive character and Hountondji put it thus:

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<sup>25</sup> H. Feigl, "The Scientific Outlook", in J. Gould Classic Philosophical Questions, pp 51-52.

<sup>26</sup> Hountondji, in Oruka, Sage philosophy, Acts Press 1991, p. 6.

Surely writing is not a prerequisite for philosophy but I doubt whether philosophy can progress adequately without writing. Had others not written down the sayings of Socrates and Buddha, we would not today regard them as philosophers, for their thoughts would have been lost in the mythological world of proverbs and pithy sayings.<sup>27</sup>

From the foregoing, it is evident that there must be some means of recording a philosophical system, so that there is evidence of systematic discourse.

Oruka however, tries to show that, writing is not a prerequisite for philosophy. He says that writing is a good way of storing thought, consequently storing philosophy. But writing is not thinking and philosophy is thinking, and one can think even if one is incapable of or has no facilities for writing. Thought without an expression dies, that is why it has been an expensive exercise to try and reconstruct thought systems.

He goes on to say that writing is a "modern practice of keeping thought but this is not to discredit the philosophic merit of the unwritten thought, the unwritten can be written and vice versa. There is no mutual exclusivity between the written and unwritten".<sup>28</sup>

This line of thought echoes F. Saussure who had called attention to the persistent tendency among scholars to think of writing as the basic form of language. Writing, he noted "has simultaneously usefulness, shortcomings and dangers. Writing he

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<sup>27</sup> P. Bodunrin; in Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp.6-7.

thought, was a kind of complement to oral speech, and not as a transformer or verbalization".<sup>29</sup>

W. Ong on the other hand outlines the importance of writing and points out that:

writing enhances orality, making it possible to organize the principles or constituents of oratory into a scientific art, as a sequentially ordered body of explanations. Writing, restructures thought, without which, human consciousness cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations. In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, literacy and writing are necessary for the development of science, history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art and indeed for the explanation of language.<sup>31</sup> As is commonly said among the Luhya community "ofwa nio wamenya", that is, one has to die to continue living. The naming system is such that, children are named after the departed to ensure ones continuity. Therefore, African Philosophy has to die from its apologetic position and complacency and move forward. To progress or develop African philosophy has to embrace new ideas. Knowledge is a continual quest, new theories are coming into being everyday, and so African Philosophy cannot hold on to the past forever.

Plato in the Phaedrus (274-7) <sup>32</sup> espouses on the shortcomings of writing. He says that writing is inhuman,

philosophical

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<sup>29</sup> F. Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, New York, Philosophical Library, 1959, pp. 23-24.

<sup>30</sup> W. Ong, Orality & Literacy, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1982, pp. 9 & 145.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10

<sup>32</sup> Plato, Phaedrus & Letters VII & VIII, trans. by W. Hamilton, England, Penguin Books, 1973.

...to establish outside the mind what in reality can only  
be in the mind. It is a thing, a manufactured product. What is  
...here is that writing cannot produce a perfect idea, it  
...produces a picture of an idea through a written word.

He goes on to say that writing destroys memory, it weakens  
the mind. Those who rely on writing will become forgetful,  
...on an external resource for what they lack in internal  
resources. Writing is passive such that, the written word cannot  
...itself as the natural spoken word can. Words spoken in the  
...can be explained by those who utter them. (Seminars,  
conferences, workshops).

The problem of orality and literacy brings us yet to another  
...among philosophers concerning the question of content.  
...philosophers are in disagreement as to what need comprise the  
...subject matter of African Philosophy, and the period from where  
...begins.

Olela points out that, "any analysis requires its object  
...the object of analysis is that which constitutes its  
...content."<sup>33</sup> In this sense, the issues that philosophers  
...speculate on or reflect on are what to a large extent constitute  
...the content. Therefore thoughts of different philosophers on  
...different issues in society can be termed as proper content for  
...philosophical discourse.

There must be something to reflect on or speculate about  
...before an analysis is made. However, the problem many  
...philosophers face rests on how to identify a problem or an object  
...which to reflect on. For some scholars such as Olela, Oruka

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<sup>33</sup> Olela, "Approaches To African Philosophy", p.30.

Mwaipaya, philosophy should speculate or reflect on problems ranging from the pre-scientific or pre-historic times to the present. Others such as Mbae, Maurier H. contend that philosophers need to tackle problems that present themselves in a modern or scientific age.

For instance, Ethno-philosophy and Sage philosophy attempt an assessment of the development of philosophy from the pre-scientific and its contributions to human thought today. However, these schools of thought have faced radical criticism from the professional philosophers or the rationalist school. They argue that Ethno-philosophy and sagacity have their sources in the oral tradition, where science, literacy and writing had not taken root, and hence they cannot suffice as proper content for philosophy. They insist on what elders or wise men and women are said to have

Olela tries to help philosophers out of this predicament by discussing the nature of philosophical problems. He contends that problems of philosophy arise outside its own parameters, and they are located in the attempt of understanding the human condition of life, speculating about the nature of the universe.<sup>34</sup>

Similar views are expressed by P. A. Mwaipaya, when he observes that, problems of philosophy are broad and general, than those of other disciplines which are narrow, limited and specialized.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>35</sup> P. A. Mwaipaya, "The Essential Features of Philosophy" (manuscript), University of Papua New Guinea, 1982,

This implies that, philosophical problems transcend specialized boundaries. They are not confined to a particular area of study or to a particular subject matter. In this way, the subject matter of philosophy is made all comprehensive. Problems of philosophy can therefore be identified from the whole world of reality from the pre-historic to the modern times.

In the words of Heraclitus, "everything is in influx".<sup>36</sup> Things are always changing and so is man. Since philosophy is thought about thought, and thought takes place in man, the history of ideas ought to begin from the pre-historic man right through the present, to be able to understand its dynamism.

It is in this context that L. Keita, observed that, "African philosophy is moribund if it does not take as its starting point, an African worldview which is the basis of the black experience"

On the other hand, H. Olela points out that, the subject matter of African Philosophy must emerge from within the tradition. Mythical accounts, he says, ought to be analyzed, criticized, reflected upon and codified into theories.<sup>38</sup>

To this end, the author attempts to analyse the historical perspective of philosophy.

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<sup>36</sup> E. O. Ayisi, An Introduction to the study of African Culture, 2nd Ed., East African Educational Publishers Ltd., Nairobi, 1992, p. 94.

<sup>37</sup> Keita in Wright R.A. African philosophy: An Introduction, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> H. Olela, "Approaches to African philosophy", p.20.

## CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF PHILOSOPHY

### 1.1 Introduction

The world is undergoing rapid and radical social change. This is due to scientific attitude and ways of thinking that have come onto the scene. The systems of communication have greatly improved. The world has experienced the expansion of industries and it is evident that modern technology has over-taken humanity.

Such progress has brought about changes in peoples' ways of thinking, dressing and attitude towards life. More people are becoming scientifically inclined in their thoughts and ways of doing things. The improved system of communication has reduced the world into a global village whereby ideas from one continent to another are easily disseminated and assimilated. As such, the past cannot adequately suffice, in the modern world.

Modes and categories inherited from the past no longer seem to fit the reality experienced by a new generation. New methods of analysis have been developed whose conclusions reveal the limitations of the outlook we inherit. Many of the features taken for granted in thought are not directly native to human existence as such, but have come into being due to the scientific and technological advancement.

Such change has inevitably affected the nature of those academic disciplines that both reflect on society and help to shape it, and African Philosophy is no exception.

It is in this background that this study has been established with an objective of carrying the intellectual venture forward other than revising small details of its first formulation, which has been a drawback to the progress of the

discipline. Much as African Philosophy has to take note of its beginnings, it must move away from spending much time in the past at the expense of new developments taking place in the World.

It ought not be retrogressive but progressive in character, taking into consideration the effects of scientific, technological discoveries, and the process of industrialization on society today.

This study, therefore, seeks to encourage rather, than resist the process of change, to stretch, rather, than reinforce the boundaries that currently define African Philosophy. More emphasis today is put on science and technology, and the modern system of communication whereby, there is the written word, electronic and print media. These features, no doubt, present the world with some challenges, and the author has tried to identify and discuss these challenges in relation to African traditional modes of critical response.

Each chapter in this study, attempts an objective exposition of significant developments in its field up to the present as well as the author's own views of the matter.

## **2.2 Historical Development of Philosophy**

In this chapter, the study examines factors that gave impetus or paved way for African Philosophy. It will give a critical survey of the Euro-centric views that were posited on and about Africa, by ethnographers, anthropologists and sociologists, including ethno-philosophers.

It is necessary, therefore, to understand what was happening in Europe, which ignited the Anthropologists to study the African



way of life. Only then will scholars understand their role and that of African Philosophy in the contemporary world.

Europe was undergoing the industrial revolution, (1789) increased production and profits. Hence, there was need to invest, and need for raw materials from Africa. To achieve this end, they came to Africa in search of raw materials and to make their investments. This culminated in the scramble for Africa and later to colonization. Such an interest caused the European governments to send in their scholars such as, Levy Bruhl, Levi Strauss, and Placide Tempels, to name but a few, to study the African way of life. This was out of the desire to understand the Africans, so as to make their governance and conversion to Christianity easier.<sup>39</sup>

In most cases the European governments used the work of these people (Ethnographers and anthropologists), in such a way as to buttress their positions of political and economic dominance, and to promote their ideas within the new colonial states.<sup>40</sup>

Missionaries, on the other hand, played a socio-psychological role of preparing Africans for colonization as well as conversion. The fact that, these people were outsiders, and they tried to study the African way of life using Western or European parameters, a lot of confusion and misconceptions were bound to occur. They tried to compare the African concepts with

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<sup>39</sup> E. Ayisi, An Introduction to the Study of African Culture, p.IX

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.xix.

their own by treating them in a distinctively Western way, not realizing that the African orientation is different from theirs.

Worse still, many of them were interested in the spiritualistic and religious thoughts of the Africans and not their philosophy as such. They, therefore, hastily concluded that Africans were radically different from Europeans in hue of their skin, and their capacity for rational thinking. They emphasized the irrational and illogical nature of the African thought. The overall verdict was that, "the African mentality was primitive, irrational and unphilosophical".<sup>41</sup>

With the growth of formal education, however, African scholars realized that an unworthy picture of the Africans had been presented and a false and misinformed interpretation had been given to the Africans thought and way of life.<sup>42</sup> With this new consciousness, African scholars made their fellow Africans aware of their situation and place in the world. Having understood their situation, Africans began to ask the question, why? In the process of asking why, they learnt that they had been living through a misconceived picture of themselves; and had been colonized both in body and mind. They realized that they had a right to exist in the world, and they were part of the human family that had the same origin and destiny, they had a role to play in decolonizing themselves from the past misconceptions.

This realization led to the formation of Black consciousness movements in U.S.A., where the black people felt the need to come

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<sup>41</sup> Oruka, Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy, pp, 14-

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.34.

back to themselves and preserve their identity. Such expressions were to be found also in the Negritude movement.<sup>43</sup>

The Black consciousness movement was, therefore, geared towards self-examination, and the decolonization of the mind from the colonial mentality and attitude. By so doing, a new interpretation of the black man would be formulated to enable the black man rediscover his identity and dignity.<sup>44</sup> Under the same umbrella, the Negritude movement came into being and created the impetus to the criticisms of the images created by the anthropologists and ethnographers about Africa, and the inherent pre-conceptions of non-western societies.

Consequently, these movements were concerned with providing a clear understanding of the black people, and to promote their identity and dignity, as human beings who were capable of rational inquiry. Their aim was also to unmask the Africans' conception of themselves from the Eurocentric parameters. As such, they could be seen as reactionary or as a response to the socio-economic and political changes that were a result of Africa's interaction with Europe.

- This is the background of African Philosophy which emerged as a response to the past misconceptions but at the intellectual level. African Philosophy was therefore, set to challenge the position that, the African was irrational and unphilosophical. African scholars aimed at asserting the fact that men are a rational beings who are capable of philosophical

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 76-80 See also Keita, "The African Philosophical Tradition" in Wright, African Philosophy: An Introduction, p.58.

regardless of their colour, and that philosophy can be integrated and practised within their own cultural milieu.

This, therefore, challenged African scholars to produce African Philosophy as an intellectual discipline. The debate on African Philosophy was thus, set in motion in answer to the questions; What is African Philosophy? Where can it be located or what should comprise its content? How can it be approached?

In trying to face these challenges, African philosophers began producing works that were later to be characterized by different approaches or schools of thought, namely, Ethno-philosophy, Sage philosophy, Nationalistic-Ideological Philosophy, Professional African Philosophy, Hermeneutic Philosophy and Literary Philosophy.<sup>45</sup> Each of these schools tried to give its understanding of what philosophy is, its methodology or procedure and what should comprise its content.

In following paragraphs, the author will give a critical survey of each school and its views as posited on and about African Philosophy. In various literature, these schools have been otherwise referred to as trends in African Philosophy. The first four trends to be examined are, Ethno-philosophy, Sage philosophy, Nationalistic -Ideological philosophy and Professional philosophy.<sup>46</sup> They will be followed by examining the later schools namely, the literary and Hermeneutical schools and the later views that have developed. The author will also endeavour to give their merits and contribution to the

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<sup>45</sup> Oruka, Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy, p.70.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.10.

development of African Philosophy and also point out some of their weakness.

Firstly, Ethno-philosophy presents the collective world views of the African peoples, their myths, folklore, tales, religious beliefs and practices. It stresses the communal nature of the African thought systems and gives its emotional appeal as one of the unique features of thought, as opposed to Philosophy which is a body of thought produced by different individuals and logically argued out.<sup>47</sup>

The term Ethno-philosophy has been used by P. J. Hountondji to refer to the works of anthropologists, Sociologists, ethnographers and philosophers who present the collective worldviews of African peoples. In this category, scholars such as P. Temples, J. S. Mbiti, L. Senghor and Alexis Kagame are represented.<sup>48</sup>

In the conceptual analysis, Ethno-philosophy is not considered as Philosophy, but Philosophy as such. That is, Philosophy in a debased sense of the term. This is mostly due to the disposition of its authors. Mbiti for instance tries to give or present the religious system. He does it on a collective scale, with an aim of showing that the Africans were a religious people and not heathens.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bodunrin, P. "Which kind of Philosophy for Africa"; Paper presented at the International Symposium in Memory of Dr. Amno Williams in Accra, July 1978, Unpublished.

<sup>48</sup> Hountondji, African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, p.20.

<sup>49</sup> J. S. Mbiti, African Religious and Philosophy, Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co. Inc., N. York, 1969, xi.

On the other hand, Tempels, is interested in the social and religious life of the Bantu people. He sets out to study the Bantu people with specific goals in mind, that of conversion to Christianity and paving a way for colonial administration. He is more interested in Bantu ontology than in their philosophy, and in understanding their theory of Being, colonialists would be able to manipulate the Africans to adopt their system. This is perhaps clear when he poses the question:

Has Bantu philosophy been studied and developed as such? If not, it is a nightmare that each scholar should start to seek out and define the fundamental thought underlying Bantu ontology. It is our task to trace out the elements of this thought, classify and systematize them according to the ordered systems and intellectual systems of the western world. <sup>50</sup>

Bantu philosophy in this sense implies the general way of life among the Bantu people, their daily habit of life and not philosophy in its strict sense. Bantu ontology represents only one aspect of their thought system and is therefore, exclusive of other aspects of reality. In short, Ethno-philosophy is characterized by generalizations which are free and sweeping and hence boils down to a communal belief system. More often than not, Ethno-philosophy is descriptive and as a response to the colonial denial of the rationality of the African and Western mode of thought, aims at reconstructing the logic inherent in African customs.

In itself Ethno-Philosophy, has helped in defining African Philosophy. It has given the background on which a real African Philosophy has to be constructed. Conversely, Ethno-philosophy

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<sup>50</sup> Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, Presence Africaine, Paris, 1959, p.23.

cannot be totally dismissed, as it has paved way for other trends that have purported to be its improvement.

Sage philosophy or philosophic sagacity is the second trend which seeks out men and women reputable for their wisdom in any given community.<sup>51</sup> It is a way of thinking and explaining of the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom (well-known communal aphorisms and general common sense truths) and didactic wisdom (an expounded wisdom and rational thought of some given individuals within a community. Under this analysis Philosophic sagacity is a reflection of a person who is a sage and a thinker. According to Oruka, "the objective of sagacity is to show that a communal consensus should not be seen as a hindrance to individual critical reflection".<sup>52</sup>

He goes on to make a distinction between the philosophic sage and a wise sage:

A sage is a person versed in the wisdom and traditions of his people, and very often he is recognized by people themselves as a sage. He is wise in the conventional historical confines of their culture. A philosophic sage on the other hand is rationally critical, and opts to recommend only those aspects of the beliefs and wisdom which satisfy his rational scrutiny.<sup>53</sup>

This school of thought has met with some objections such that its sources purport to be unwritten. Besides, the sages are more often than not, illiterate or semi-illiterate. However, this does not comprise enough grounds to reject this school of thought. Philosophers need to go out in the field to seek for

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<sup>51</sup> Oruka, Sage Philosophy; p.41

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.48.

concepts with a philosophical bearing and develop them. African Philosophy if it is to be developed, should be in the African framework. Oral literature in form of myths and stories should be studied and analyzed as purveyors of thought. Hountondji expresses similar views when he observed that;

there exists a considerable body of oral literature, esoteric or exoteric, the importance of which we are only beginning to suspect. We must have the patience to study it, analyze it, investigate its logic, its function and its merits.<sup>54</sup>

Only then, could scholars be in a position to examine and determine how orality could actualize real factual texts and precise knowledge, which once well understood could be reproduced and enshrined in the frame of philosophical discourse. The denial of the philosophical component of the sages cannot be really accepted, since, Philosophy at its foundation has man as its subject of study, man being both a rational and cultural agent, who is part of the world and takes part in fashioning its history.

Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy is the third trend. This school is represented by the works of intellectually and philosophically leading Africans about Africa's social, cultural, political and economic problems in the colonial and post-independence periods. Some of its proponents include, J. M. Nyerere, K. Nkuruma, and L. Senghor.<sup>55</sup>

This school attempted to evolve a new and, if possible, a unique political theory based on traditional African Socialism,

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<sup>54</sup> Hountondji, African Philosophy, pp. 168 & 178.

<sup>55</sup> Oruka, Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy, pp. 17-



and familyhood. It is argued that, a true and meaningful freedom must be accompanied by a true mental liberation and return whenever possible and desirable to the genuine and authentic humanism.<sup>56</sup>

It should, however, be pointed out that times have changed and so have traditional societies. What sufficed in the past cannot adequately suffice in the present. This is due to the fact that society is dynamic, in view of the technological advancement and scientific discoveries that are taking place. The scientific attitude has permeated through human societies and most things have changed. In addition Christianity, Islam and colonization has far reaching negative effects on the traditional life. The modern society is complex compared to traditional society where life was so simple. But with rapid urbanization, Africans cannot maintain close family units.

As such, traditional communalism and socialism cannot adequately work in modern Africa. The demands of the modern world are far too complex. This school of thought, however, does not represent the collective view of the Africans nor does it describe their traditional philosophy. Rather, philosophers of this school of thought have tried to base their philosophy on the traditional past in establishing whether it can make significant contributions on ideas of governance or political theories.

Professional Philosophy as the fourth trend takes the universalist view of philosophy, and comprises of professionally trained philosophers, who argue that philosophy must have the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

same meaning in all cultures, though subjects that receive priority and methods of dealing with them may be dictated by cultural biases, and the existential situation in the society within which philosophers operate. Criticism, argument and scholarship, are essential characteristics of what passes as philosophy.<sup>57</sup> In this view, mere descriptive accounts of thought systems would not pass as Philosophy in the strict sense.

Most proponents of this school, have been educated or schooled in the Western tradition of philosophy. As such, they employ some techniques of Western philosophy in their study of African Philosophy. As a trend, it derives its convictions from its status as a discourse which is firmly linked to both the Western tradition of philosophy as a discipline and the academic structures which guarantee institutionally accepted philosophical practices. This trend serves as a watchdog to ensure that scholars do not compromise the standards.

In addition to the four trends, three more schools of thought have come into being, namely, the Hermeneutical, Literary and Historical schools.<sup>58</sup> The term Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word 'Hermeneus' meaning interpreter. It is the art of interpretation or explanation of ancient writings. The Hermeneutical school is therefore, concerned with the interpretation and analysis of the thought systems. This school aims at the reconstruction of a knowledge and culture that is authentically in African nature and content. It aims at

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<sup>57</sup> Bodunrin, "Which Kind Of Philosophy For Africa", pp. 1&2.

<sup>58</sup> V. Y. Mudimbe, The Surreptitious of Speech: Presence Africaine & the Politics of Otherness, 1947 - 1987, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 229-231.

establishing whether some ways of the African thought can be integrated in the general practices of philosophy.

The school further attempts a re-definition and re-affirmation of the epistemological position, by critically analysing individual languages to determine whether some of their concepts have philosophical connotations. In so doing, they will be able to develop them thereby resolving problems of identity crisis within the epistemological paradigms, in which the Africans are trying to present their own understanding and interpretation of the universe using parameters which are familiar and relevant to the mental framework. Some representatives of this school include scholars like V.Ocaya, Alexis Kagame and T. Okere.<sup>59</sup>

The study and analysis of language is important as thought in whatever form takes place in language. Peoples' thoughts about the World and their experiences can only be expressed in some form of language. Thus, when studying any thought it is important that one also understands the language in question. A peoples' conception of the World depends on the wealth or poverty of concepts at their disposal.

The study and analysis of language further illuminates peoples' thought structures, and enables them to identify the limitations of their conceptual framework. This presents people with a chance of introducing other new concepts into a language or discard some that are not wholly communicative.

The Literary school or approach on the other hand, comprises of works of novelists like, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 229-231.

Justice Moyo, who critically assesses issues affecting the society in general. Their views are mainly based on the existential situation of the Africans. They point out the evils of neo-colonialism whereby the Africans ape or imitate the Western modes of government, dressing and mannerisms without considering their own situation.<sup>60</sup> This echoes the dictum, 'charity begins at home' or the Socratic saying, 'know thyself'. It is also by knowing and understanding oneself, that one can be able to make meaningful adjustments in life. Africans ought not to take everything as the gospel truth but must subject them to critical analysis, and evaluation.

Finally, the Historical school is concerned with collecting texts that are important to the development of African Philosophy, with an aim of creating its own library from which students and other scholars can draw from. So far, these are the main approaches or trends that currently define African Philosophy.

The task of the next chapter is to analyze the task of African Philosophy and how it compares with General Philosophy.

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<sup>60</sup> V. Y. Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa:- Gnosis, Philosophy & the Order of Knowledge;, pp. 164-165.

## CHAPTER TWO: AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

### 2.1 Introduction

The term Philosophy is a Greek word, 'Philo' and 'Sophia' which means a love of wisdom.<sup>61</sup> A Philosopher is therefore a lover of wisdom or one who yearns for truth or seeks the truth. This gives the connotation that the philosophical enterprise is concerned with the search of wisdom. The wisdom which a philosopher seeks for, is an adequate understanding of the meaning of his own existence and that which will help him form a satisfactory way of life.<sup>62</sup> This kind of explanation implies that, philosophy concerns the experience of human beings, and it is a human reflection on life, nature, what there is and what could be.

This in turn makes Philosophy an all-comprehensive subject and thus relative in its character. When a term becomes relative, it inhibits the danger of being ambiguous and vague, thereby causing a lot of confusion. In dealing with African Philosophy, it is, therefore, necessary that one states the sense or context in which a term is being applied, so as to steer clear of the confusions and ambiguity that characterizes a term.

For purposes of definition, the author is going to give two senses or meanings of Philosophy as the lived experience, and as the reflective or intellectual activity. Philosophy as the lived experience is a general outlook on life, an everyday occurrence of activities. This kind of outlook for most part is uncritical

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<sup>61</sup> Melvin, Rader, The Enduring Questions: Main problems of Philosophy, Holt Rinehart & Winston Inc., 1969, p.4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

unexamined, it is a kind of habit which people go through in everyday life.<sup>63</sup> This kind of philosophy is therefore limited in as far as each community or society has its own norms and orientation in terms of environment, customs and traditions. By implication, Philosophy then becomes local, it is always someone's, somewhere and somewhen; tied to a historical community from which it speaks.

This kind of philosophy is mainly concerned with worldviews or "weltanschauung", as described by ethnographers, anthropologists and ethnophilosophers, who paraphrased different traditions, their wisdom and linguistic expressions. This is what Wiredu refers to as, "traditional philosophy".<sup>64</sup> This is an accumulated wisdom of what might be called the collective mind of societies, handed down through traditions of both verbal and behavioral, including aspects of art, ritual and ceremony.

Every society or people have at their base a traditional philosophy that is pre-scientific. As such, this cannot be said to be philosophy in the strict sense of the term, as it lacks the radical requirements that it should be critical, reflective and discursive in character. More often than not, traditional philosophies tend to be dogmatic, unquestioned and closed. In short, this briefly explains what is meant by Philosophy as a way of life or as it is lived. Traditional philosophy, is geared towards helping the society from a basis for a satisfactory way of life, by interpreting the facts of human existence.

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<sup>63</sup> H. Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 26.

<sup>64</sup> K. Wiredu, Philosophy and an African Culture, p.28.

The second sense of Philosophy as an intellectual activity gives it a universal character. This implies that Philosophy is given to exploring and understanding the human world. It entails both the interpretation and inspection of facts in the human world. Philosophy bears on the experience of humans and reflects on it, hence makes clear the facts of experience by critically examining and assessing them. The critical aspect makes it objective and open, enabling it to look at things or facts from many vantage points.

Oruka defines reflective Philosophy as, "a critical evaluation of a peoples outlook to life and a free reflection on ideas and concepts as mirrors of reality".<sup>65</sup> People reflect on both their ideas and those of other people, and this is the only way in which they can be objective and enrich their own understanding. How does one reflect on other people's ideas unless they are written or in form of a discussion? It is in the very art of communication through conversation or the written word that people can learn about other ideas. Communication through debate or writing is what has led to the refinement of peoples' ideas, the progress in science, human development, knowledge and thought.

In this sense, Philosophy as an intellectual activity cannot escape the requirement that it must be critical, written and discursive in character. Only then, will it stand the test of time as a progressive subject that is continual. Further, it will be clarified and its interrelationship to the whole germ of

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<sup>65</sup> Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 26.

knowledge be understood; in terms of its contributions to human thought, or system of human knowledge in general.

As an intellectual activity, Philosophy is a critical and systematically explicit system of thought. This carries the implication that it is dynamic and is evolving with time. Because of its' explicitness, different theories have been advanced namely, ethnophilosophy, Nationalist-Ideological, Sage Philosophy, to name but a few, which have attempted a definition, methodology, and content.

Philosophy is also both analytical and autocritical. This implies that, it is critical of itself as well as other sciences. It does not only question the methods of other sciences, but also that of its own. It is open to criticisms and this makes it more refined and dependable. This further enables it to adjust its views in line with the needs of the time and knowledge as it develops. This is due to the fact that, human nature and philosophical concepts emanating from it are also dynamic.

### **Definition and Concerns of Philosophy.**

For any study to be meaningful and clearly understood, a definition is vital. A definition is necessary in delineating boundaries of a proper discussion. Further still, a definition will enable one understand the interrelationship between different subjects and also distinguish between kinds of knowledge; that which is based upon inspection of facts and another on interpretation of facts. Scholars are also able to point out the objects of thought in terms of the particular and



the universals by the process of definition.<sup>66</sup> By so doing, they are able to eliminate vagueness and ambiguity that may characterize a term.

As such, African Philosophy needs to be clearly defined to make clear its relationship to the whole system of philosophy and knowledge in general. In this way, its contribution to human knowledge and understanding would be made known and understood.

The term African Philosophy should be understood in the context of intellectual philosophy as has been discussed above.

'African Philosophy' as the lived experience, is characterized by traditional African Philosophy, that is, the traditional worldview and more generally that of practical and traditional wisdom rather than, that of explicit and critical system of thought.<sup>67</sup>

Traditional wisdom, consist of bold assertions without supportive argument and clarification. It mainly centers on what elders said or are said to have said. Wiredu therefore concludes that, without argument and clarification, there is strictly no philosophy.<sup>68</sup>

### **2.3 Status of African Philosophy**

African Philosophy as an intellectual discipline is universal. Its relationship to Philosophy in general is harmonious and complementary. This implies that, the two have a common goal, of reflecting on human life, nature and the

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<sup>66</sup> S. E. Stumpf, A History of Philosophy: Socrates to Satre, McGraw Hill Inc., 1988, pp. 40-45.

<sup>67</sup> Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa, p. 153.

<sup>68</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.48.

universe in general. Despite, their different orientation in terms of environment and disposition, otherwise they are on the same platform, going to the same direction.

Consequently, African Philosophy is a persistent and resolute attempt to understand the human world or the universe from an African point of view (experiences, environment, values, nature) in relation to the rest of the universe, and ascertain the contributions such knowledge can give or add to the germ of human knowledge. This will in turn enable scholars to assess its relationship to the development of human thought or knowledge.

Both disciplines are interdependent in as far as both are interested in the evolution of ideas. It is not therefore harmful for the two to share insights. The willingness to share insights presents scholars with a rich intellectual landscape that is essential if they are to understand the universe and their place in it. This in turn affords us the refinement of worldviews and traditional beliefs. This does not mean forcing the African reality through the mould of Western thought or vice versa, as either philosophy developed from different motives, therefore, common points in them must be found for comparison.

It is important to the history of ideas that scholars discover and understand the relation between African thought and thought of the western world as both are intrinsically valuable. For Wright, to do Philosophy at all, one must be open to diversity of thought trying to place it in the context of the whole of Philosophy.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Wright, African Philosophy: An Introduction, p. 48.

African Philosophy need therefore be a continual process characterized by debate, creating a discursive space in which an epistemology and problematic related to African historical experiences can be constructed.<sup>70</sup> African Philosophy can therefore be conceived in the Socratic sense as a continuous quest, search and love for wisdom.

The fact that, one requirement for African Philosophy is that it must be written, does not imply that it is not in existence. It is in the making, whereby professional philosophers are re-evaluating and critically appraising the fundamental principles underlying the African experience.

African Philosophy however, should not be construed in the Hountondjian sense, as a set of texts written by Africans themselves and described as philosophical by their authors themselves.<sup>71</sup> Hountondji's position limits knowledge to the geographical content of the authors. How can one determine his work as philosophical, without debate? Does he imply that one can write a piece of work and label it as philosophical without being subjected to philosophical conditions or requirements.

Oruka counters this position when he notes that:

African Philosophy cannot only be a product of native Africans. An alien who has lived and worked in Africa and developed philosophical interests in certain problems within an African culture or setting can rightly produce a philosophical work that rightly deserves the adjective African.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Mudimbe, Invention of Africa, p. 154.

<sup>71</sup> Hountondji, African Philosophy: Myth & Reality, p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 28.

The author concurs with Oruka, in as far as, African Philosophy is an intellectual and universal enterprise. African Philosophy should, be defined in a sense in which it does not mean that only Africans are capable of a philosophy of this kind. Mbiti's position is too subjective and, therefore, self-defeating in approach. It is too narrow a means to analysis, and does not allow for comparisons. Hence, scholars need to make use of work by those in the field and those outside the field, provided they are dealing with the thought of the people in question.

Having made the two senses clear, it follows that African Philosophy should not be confused or used synonymously with traditional African Philosophy. The two are distinctively different in terms of method and scope. Whereas traditional African Philosophy is implicit, and limited to the environment of a particular community from which it speaks, African Philosophy is explicit, critical, reflective and systematic, therefore, enlightening the world as a whole. In this sense, its goals are not different from the general discipline of philosophy, despite the historical, cultural and environmental differences. African Philosophy can, therefore, give illumination to the general discipline of philosophy, and vice versa.

African Philosophy and the general discipline need not be at par, much as it treats traditional African Philosophy as part of its content, to furnish it with concepts that can be developed. This is all in the spirit of scholarship of trying to understand and know how different people of a different

generation dealt with their problems, and whether such systems of thought can make considerable contributions to the modern systems of thought. Knowledge as it were, is not a monopoly of one group but is universal. It is the willingness of humanity to exchange ideas that have led to what is called progress or development. It is not, therefore, harmful for African philosophy to delve into the oral past or borrow a leaf from the Western or other philosophies. People are awakened to thought when they encounter reality, or an object to speculate about. In fact, it is Ethno-philosophy and especially in Temples' and Mbiti's work that revolutionized the current debate on African philosophy, together with works of scholars such as Levy Bruhl and G. W. Hegel. Philosophers, then, set out to correct the European or colonial mentality, that the African person was incapable of rational discourse.

The colonial attitude towards Africa can perhaps be summed up in Hegel's conception of Africa thus:

Africa proper has remained for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world shut up; it is the Goldland compressed within itself... lying beyond the day of self-conscious history. The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend for the reason that in reference to it, we must give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas - the category of universality. In Negro life, the characteristic point is that consciousness has not yet [been] attained to realization of any substantial objective existence, for instance God or law in which the interest of man's volition is involved, and in which he realizes his own being. The distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being has not yet attained; so that the knowledge of the absolute being, an other, and a higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting.

There is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.<sup>73</sup>

This kind of attitude is what perhaps send scholars scurrying to Africa to try and study the Africans and comprehend their character and way of life. Basically Tempels', Bantu Philosophy; and Mbiti's African Religions and Philosophy, are works that tried to explain or present the African way of life. Since the two have leanings towards theology, their works were mainly to assist missionaries get converts, by seeing how Christianity could be patterned or be related to the African traditional life. Tempels, was also serving his masters by paving way for colonialism.

This is especially clear when he observed that:

A better understanding of the realm of Bantu thought is just as indispensable for all who are called upon to live among native people. It therefore concerns all colonials, especially those whose duty is to hold administrative or judicial office among African people... It concerns all who wish to civilize, educate and raise the Bantu. But if it concerns all colonizers with good will, it concerns most particularly missionaries.<sup>74</sup>

The titles of these books have caused a lot of confusion among scholars. The sense of Philosophy implied here, is the lived experience or a way of life. These works, led African philosophers to formulate African Philosophy, and therefore, played a revolutionary role which culminated in literature on the subject. Work on African Philosophy has developed historically in a manner characterizing different approaches, and continues to develop.

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<sup>73</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of History, Dover Publications Inc., 1956, pp. 91-93.

<sup>74</sup> Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, p. 23.

## 2.4 Concerns of Philosophy

After this brief definition of African philosophy, the author turns her attention into the analysis of Philosophy in an attempt to make corrections about some misconceptions that people have towards African philosophy. To most people, Philosophy is seen as irrelevant and of no greater value in society. This explains why philosophers have sometimes been referred to as 'armchair scholars' that is, their field does not seem to be practical and of greater concern to the world community.

Society today is so pragmatic such that it is only interested in something that will offer some practical or tangible results or benefits, in terms of employment, success and so forth. As a result, a discipline which does not offer such tangible benefits is seen as impractical. This explains why some people often dismiss philosophy as vague and uncertain, it bakes no bread.<sup>75</sup>

We however, argue that, any discipline should not only be viewed as a means to an end but also as an end in itself. One needs to consider both sides of the coin before making any judgement. No one is therefore, justified in dismissing philosophy as vague and uncertain until all aspects pertaining to the subject have been carefully considered. Otherwise, there is really no ground for rejecting or accepting it. Those who dismiss philosophy as vague and uncertain have not the slightest idea of what the field of philosophy entails. Either they have heard from someone else or what they have are just stereotypes

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<sup>75</sup> C. H. Petterson, Philosophy: An Introduction, Cliffs' Notes, Inc., Nebraska, 1972, p. 1.

about the discipline. One, therefore, needs the patience to study the tenets or objectives of any discipline before making any judgement about them.

If by practical one implies financial gains, and production of material goods, then Philosophy is not practical as would be of other disciplines. But, if practical is meant that which will increase the value and significance of life in totality, then, Philosophy is one of the most practical studies that can be pursued.<sup>76</sup>

Philosophy tries to understand the underlying meaning of life, nature and the universe. It attempts to establish the value of human life, and institutions hence increases the value of life. Philosophy unlike the sciences deals with the realm of values, what ought to be and this gives order and purpose to humanity. It also treats the field of science and factual information. Values have to do with the worth of things and this is something that is outside the sphere of physical sciences. Science reports what should be and is more interested in the results than the effect of its discoveries on human life as a whole.<sup>77</sup> Science describes what actually exists but does not evaluate, therefore, it is amoral, that is, it does not tell one anything about what is good or bad. In other words, science does not bother so much about the moral implications of its discoveries or theories.

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<sup>76</sup> William James, Some Problems of Philosophy, Longmans Green, N. York, 1911, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Petterson, Philosophy: An Introduction, p.2.



Philosophy cannot impart the final truth about values but it can and does explore theories concerning values and it provides means for criticizing and evaluating them. In this way, it serves as a guide towards a more adequate understanding of what constitutes the meaning and value of human life.

In addition, Philosophy as a love for wisdom, is a value in itself even when it is not a means to an end. It adds to ones knowledge about himself and the world in which he lives. Since the desire to know is one of the essential characteristics of human nature, any knowledge which one obtains through the study of Philosophy will contribute towards a satisfaction of this desire.<sup>78</sup> Much as knowledge is both a source of pleasure and gain, people are warranted in assuming that knowledge is better than ignorance. Ignorance only serves to blur peoples rational perception while knowledge develops their abilities and molds their character. Without wisdom and understanding, human knowledge is futile. To love something is to seek to understand it, explain it, and relate it with other objects. Therefore, Philosophy as a love of wisdom seeks to understand or gain knowledge of objects of existence, their connections and thereby unify them into a whole system of understanding.<sup>79</sup>

Subsequently, Philosophy encourages open mindedness of looking at things or issues from many vantage points. In this sense, it is designed to overcome the attitude which tends towards dogmatism and indoctrination. It defies tradition as the

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<sup>78</sup> E. L. Beardsley, & M. C. Beardsley, Invitation to Philosophical Thinking, Harcourt Brace, Javanovich, Inc., 1972, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.10.

the source of knowledge and denounces simplistic and naive explanations. Nothing is taken for granted, rather, everything is critically treated by one's rational faculties. Philosophy thus plays the liberational role of freeing human beings from the fetters of tradition, public opinion, prejudice, superstition and ignorance.<sup>80</sup>

This in turn checks against mob psychology whereby might and multitude are seen to be right. By encouraging open-mindedness, knowledge is viewed from different perspectives and this gives human beings alternatives to choose from.

This encourages intellectual independence, whereby one is able to use reason, as one cannot think for another person. It is the difference in opinion that further necessitates debate in an attempt to determine the best possible position to adopt. Intellectual independence however, does not imply the repudiation of all tradition but, rather, it is a way of giving the individuals the freedom to use their own judgement to determine the firmness of their beliefs, and traditions to establish whether they are rationally defensible.<sup>81</sup> It is better to enjoy intelligent dissents, than passive agreements which do not pass the critical and rational test. The Socratic dictum that, 'an unexamined life is not worth living' is worth noting here, such that nothing should be taken wholesale without critical examination.

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<sup>80</sup> Mbae, "Is there an African Philosophy", in Nyasani, p. 47.

<sup>81</sup> B. Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, Oxford University, 1912, p.15.

Philosophy gives attention to ideals as well actualities. It is only with reference to an ideal that one can criticize and evaluate his own activities as well as those of others. An ideal gives people a standard of the direction they need to take or a goal they hope to achieve. An ideal presupposes progress and this means movement in the direction of an ideal.<sup>82</sup> Without a vision of an ideal people cannot achieve progress. For instance, it is the moral ideal that constitutes the standard of goodness and evil, the aesthetic ideal is the standard of beauty and ugliness, whereas, the logical ideal constitute the standard of truth in the realm of ideas, and the same is true in regard to political economic and social institutions.<sup>83</sup>

Lastly, Philosophy helps people to adjust by critical evaluating their belief systems and customs in line with needs of the time, in as far as it is a continual process of finding valuable solutions to human problems at different times and situations. This is based on the understanding that, time is not static, it changes as people progress and develop so what worked in the past cannot sufficiently work in the present. Life is dynamic and new views and the concerns of philosophy continue to flourish, African Philosophy is part and parcel of that life and hence a dynamic discipline like any other Science from the West or Oriental world.

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<sup>82</sup> Petterson, Philosophy: An Introduction, p.3.

<sup>83</sup> T. E. Katen, Doing Philosophy, Prentice Hall, Inc., New Jersey, 1973, p. 143.

## CHAPTER THREE: AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND AUTHORSHIP

### 3.1 Methodology in African Philosophy

Since the subject of methodology entails both the question of procedure and objectives, in this chapter the author will examine methods that African Philosophy ought to adopt and their objectives.

This approach is necessitated by the fact that, most scholars of African Philosophy have a Western orientation in philosophy and it is extremely difficult for them to develop a method that is authentically African. Besides, having studied Western Philosophy, it was only natural that they also study their own to find out whether there were opposite or equivalent concepts to the ones they had come across; and, if so, how were the concepts related or different in their logical behaviour from those of Western Philosophy.

From the foregoing, it becomes evident that African Philosophy developed as a result of its interaction with the western mode of philosophy. Rarely do scholars turn around to study or criticize themselves without some external impetus, or, provide justifications for their beliefs without some challenge. There must be some object of speculation which turns round the eye of the soul to serious reflections.

Given this kind of situation, how, then, do African Philosophers study their own Philosophy? What procedures should they adopt in their study and with which kind of objectives? These questions are complex given the circumstances of the African Philosopher, who is suspended between two traditions of

Philosophy. Such issues engage scholars' biases and, therefore, a method that is highly objective must be adopted.

Methodology simply defined means, the procedure and aims of a particular discipline.<sup>84</sup> Simply put, it refers to the ways, means or specification of steps through which a particular discipline achieves its objectives or goals. In this respect, African Philosophy must develop a methodology through which it can define and achieve its objectives. By so doing, it will ensure its continuity and progress. Methodology is also important as it determines the kind of questions or concerns raised within the scope of any field. It also enables scholars to distinguish between what can or cannot count as Philosophy. Once a subject defines its methodology, it is easily understood and grasped by any scholar. This is the only way that will make African Philosophy relevant and meaningful when it develops a methodology proper to its existential situation taking into account both the historical and contemporary experiences. Hence, African Philosophy needs to develop a method of its own to enable philosophers resolve some of the problems they encounter in the field. This would help the African Philosophy to overcome the misconceptions or accusations that they have been copying the Western type of Philosophy.

In some instances, professional philosophers have been suspected of importing Western techniques into African Philosophy in their critique of Ethno-Philosophy and their insistence that the discipline has to exhibit critical reflection and analysis.

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<sup>84</sup> A.S. Hornby, Oxford Advanced Dictionary Of Current English, Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 533.

Oruka therefore, puts forth Philosophical Sagacity as the only trend that can give an all-acceptable decisive blow to the position of Ethno-Philosophy. None of the other trends can objectively and decisively play this role.<sup>85</sup>

This kind of argumentation portrays scholarly selfishness on Oruka's part. Such kind of problems can be minimized or avoided when there is a laid down procedure, to facilitate an understanding. A critique of Ethno-Philosophy by professional philosophers should not be seen as a reverse or rejection of the school, rather should be seen ;

as a policy discourse on Philosophy aimed at examining methods and requirements for practising philosophy in Africa... it is a reflection of the methodological limits of Tempels and Kagame school.<sup>86</sup>

This further attests the need of a working methodology. African philosophers ought to have a methodology of their own so as to steer clear of such drawbacks and misunderstandings among themselves. Once this is done, African Philosophy will stand a firm ground on which it will speak itself into existence by making clear its objectives.

The African philosopher being suspended between two traditions of Philosophy, namely, his/her own traditional philosophy and Western philosophy has to adopt a method that is highly critical and objective in character. The two modes are characterized by different historical, environmental and cultural factors, hence there exists a danger of bringing in African cultural and existential biases. As such the African scholar

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<sup>85</sup> Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 47.

<sup>86</sup> Mudimbe, Invention Of Africa, p.153.

should guard against the temptation of using the corpus of Western Philosophy as a yardstick against African Philosophy. As thinkers, African Philosophers should be inspired by a desire for truth when they philosophize, otherwise their thoughts run the danger of being led astray by his feelings, and past history.

Given this kind of complexity, African Philosophy, then, has to be approached from two dimensions; the emic and etic approach. The emic approach enables one to proceed objectively, making comparisons and generalizations between different categories of thought. The etic approach, on the other hand, will allow scholars to proceed subjectively by analysing concepts in the African thought system as they appear in their own integrity. When both approaches are brought into play, adequate comparisons and generalizations of different Worldviews can be made without being overly biased. At the end of it all one will appreciate how each mode dealt with fundamental questions.

African Philosophy therefore, must execute the comparative method for it to develop as it cannot exist in isolation. Wiredu expresses a similar understanding when he observes that:

A student of African Philosophy ought to adopt a highly critical approach and as a corollary, a comparative method to see how far issues and concepts of universal relevance can be disentangled from the contingencies of culture.<sup>87</sup>

What stands out is, the fact, that objectivity and critical analysis must underly philosophical studies. Philosophy, then as an intellectual discipline must have the same meaning in all cultures. This implies that, the original meaning of the term Philosophy must not be altered even when it is enlarged or

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<sup>87</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.31.

extended. This does not override the importance of the subjective method. It is equally useful as it gives scholars the way to deeply study their own concepts and appreciate them before looking elsewhere. It checks against egocentrism, inferiority complex, enabling one appreciate others and borrow what she/he does not have to improve oneself.

By adopting a highly critical method, African Philosophy will not only critique methods and objectives of other disciplines, but also to be critical of its own. It has to make an evaluation of its tenets from time to time and make considerable adjustments. Only then, will it avoid being naive and apologetic. Instead of giving mere descriptive accounts of the African systems of thought, an African philosopher should make a critical appraisal of such systems to determine whether such thought, can make any contributions to the modern systems of thought and help scholars face challenges of today.

The critical method is important in clarifying the foundations of knowledge and their validation. This implies that knowledge derived from common sense, customs, traditions and any other source must be subjected to critical analysis to establish whether such knowledge is rationally defensible or reliable. The method further encourages intellectual independence whereby one can undertake research in any field, knowing that knowledge is not a monopoly of any one given group or class of people.

Since thought takes place in language, the method of critical analysis will enable one to analyze meaning of words and statements as used in any given context. Such an analysis will help in distinguishing between the different senses in which a



term is employed, and the beliefs associated with that particular term.<sup>88</sup> This will further make clear the relation between different categories of being and bring one to a systematic understanding of the African conceptual system. Having understood African conceptual system, one can then make adequate comparisons with others. This will further enable the students of African Philosophy to systematize their findings into a coherent whole.

If African Philosophy has to speak relevantly to the condition and situation of her own people and the world in general, she must take cognizance of the scientific and technological advances taking place in the world. The scientific attitude and ways of thinking pervade the contemporary society. People are more interested in what can produce practical results or that which can speak relevantly to their situation. Hence, scholars of African philosophy ought to take this into account. According to Wiredu:

a philosopher should be aware of the scientific method of exactness and rigour in thought, the pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach so characteristic of science. These are intellectual virtues in themselves and necessary conditions for rapid modernization.<sup>89</sup>

Wiredu's sentiments were long expressed by Pierce; as concerns the scientific approach. According to him, all nature works by a common process to a common end, and the duty of a person is to aid that process by devoting himself to scientific

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<sup>88</sup> M. Weitz, 20th Century Philosophy, pp.8 & 207.

<sup>89</sup> Wiredu, p. 33.

inquiry which alone can discover the truth or falsity of potential habits and hence fix belief. <sup>90</sup>

Therefore, African Philosophy, cannot dispense with the scientific method. If African Philosophy is to be progressive, it has to adopt a scientific outlook when carrying out its studies. The characteristics of the scientific method, namely, precision, coherence and comprehensiveness, intersubjectivity and exactness, have afforded science its progressive character.<sup>91</sup>

Intersubjectivity is a necessary requirement for any discipline in as far as it is a social enterprise. It stresses the social nature of any scholar, and implies that knowledge claims are capable of confirmation or disconfirmation at least indirectly or to some degree on the part of any person properly equipped with intelligence and technical devices of observation or experimentation <sup>92</sup>

This further implies that African Philosophy ought to be an open book, whereby its findings or knowledge is made accessible. This brings with it, another implication, that, it must be written and disseminated for a wider reading. In turn, arguments and debates will develop in an effort to ascertain the validity to knowledge claims put forth and for purposes of refining them to establish the firmness of their foundation. When applied, this method will ensure freedom from partiality, personal or cultural bias.

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<sup>90</sup> Pierce, in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Logic to Psychologism, Vol.6, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1967. pp. 77-78.

<sup>91</sup> H. Feigl, in Gould, *Ibid.*, P.51.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

The scientific method is also characterized by definiteness and precision, whereby concepts used in the formulation of scientific knowledge-claims are required to be as definitely delimited as possible. This amounts to the attempts to reduce all border-zone vagueness to a minimum. Such a goal or precision can be achieved through the process of definition in philosophy. This entails giving the essential meanings or connotation of a term.

A definition must be sufficiently precise and sharp to distinguish the element from all other elements involved, and at the same time must be such as to make clear its relationship to them<sup>93</sup>. In this way, the vagueness and ambiguity that may characterize a term can be pointed out, reduced or avoided all together. African Philosophy ought to begin with definitions if it is to have some scientific value; of being systematic and coherent.

More often than not, Philosophy employs concepts and abstractions by means of which it formulates laws and theories. As such, the process of definition is very important as it helps add to ones' knowledge of facts and understanding of their relationship. In this sense, proper laws and theories can be formulated as issues will have been clarified.

The process of definition further enables scholars to distinguish between two kinds of knowledge: that acquired through interpretation of facts, and that, acquired through the inspection of facts. Knowledge is more than simply an inspection

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<sup>93</sup> The New Universal Library Encyclopedia, Vol. 4 COL- DR. I.L.S.C, 1969, p.500.

of facts, it has to do with the power of the mind to grasp the distinction between the particular and the universal.

In so doing, one will be able to sort out the facts, the accidental and the abiding elements, as facts can produce a variety on notions. For instance, two people cannot be the same in terms of disposition and understanding, although they are all human beings. As such, the process of definition helps one to arrive at clear and fixed concepts. This in turn reduces or eliminates vagueness and ambiguity, as situations and experiences in natural events to which the term can be ascribed are pointed out.

Having critically analyzed concepts both in the Western and African Philosophy, the student of African Philosophy can proceed to make a comparative study of the two worlds or modes of operative thought. African Philosophy cannot dispense with the comparative method, if it is to be understood in the whole realm of philosophy. It is by the comparative method that the interrelationship between different philosophies can be understood. As such, the comparative method is important in the study of philosophy.

The comparative method entails a comparison of philosophies in different civilizations with an aim of acquiring a universal philosophical cognition. Hasumi T. gives the underlying character of the comparative method as the, "research for universal and fundamental cognition of truth in philosophical whether the subjects are oriental, occidental or modern."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Hasumi, "Problems of Comparative Philosophy", in Oruka & Masolo, p.119.

Characterized this way, it gives the implication that the comparative method of philosophy aims at constructing a universal theory of truth and reality. However, in trying to compare a peoples conception of truth or the idea of God, the philosophers attempt to determine their essence. They want to establish whether such principles are founded on rational grounds and stand the test of rational or philosophical inquiry.

Hasumi further points out that, truth in philosophy must be universal, although it may be expressed diversely. Diversity of philosophical expression in no way means multiplicity of truth, rather it indicates the universal and fundamental character of truth related to such diversity.<sup>95</sup>

The comparative method of study will enable one to analyze different philosophies and separate their fundamental ideas about life, man, God, and organize them into a coherent whole. The interrelationship, however, must be made clear between the cognition areas of individual philosophies as each philosophy developed from different motives, and common points must be found for comparison. If it entails matters of translation, the translation ought to be symmetrical, that is, concepts or ideas translated must be similar in either culture. For instance, African folk thought should be compared with Western folk thought and not Western Philosophy.<sup>96</sup>

It should be noted that the comparative method is required to be both objective and critical. To execute such a philosophy, those involved must be open-minded, and be self-critical to avoid any biases. The comparative method also ensures that one does

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>96</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.148.

not take things for granted; and further enlarges ones' conception of thinking and ways of looking at things.

By employing the comparative method, African Philosophy will be able to see and appreciate how different people struggle with fundamental issues concerning human life. It will also understand its place and role in the development of human knowledge and the world as such.

The comparative method further affords scholars a rich intellectual landscape, which is essential, for them to understand the universe and its place. Intercultural exchange of ideas is important in development of systems of thought. It is the cooperative efforts among the ancient philosophers that led to the intellectual giantism of classical systems of thought.

In conclusion, the comparative method provides African Philosophy and others with checks and balances. It is able to make adjustments in the right direction. The contemporary African Philosopher can learn from the mistakes of others and avoid them. Without the willingness of philosophers with different cultural backgrounds to share insights, the refinement of worldviews and cultural beliefs would not be possible nor could a philosophical tradition evolve rapidly.

By executing this method, scholars will be able to create systems or complete worldviews in which all their experiences find expression and meaning. This will, in turn, make Philosophy comprehensive. Scholars will also be able to arrive at reliable knowledge whereby mere superstition would be separated from well substantiated belief of knowledge. By so doing, African Philosophy can be understood fully in relation to philosophy in

general. From the foregoing, it is clear that the methods actually used by philosophy overlap with those used outside it, but philosophers are free to use any type of critical discussion that is relevant to the problems confronting them.

The following are some of the objectives that should concern African Philosophers: They should work at resolving questions raised by the African political scientists, economists and sociologists; and they should also let their voices be heard on the question of what mode of social and political organization is best suited to the African situation.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, African Philosophy should endeavour to foster in people at all events, the spirit of rational inquiry in all spheres of thought and belief by making a critical appraisal of African cultures and traditions. The discipline must also try and create a discursive space in which an epistemological and problematic related issues to African historical experiences are easily constructed. It also ought to face squarely the challenges of modernization and industrialization, and work towards changing inadequate social, economic and political structures in order to improve life standards of the African People.

### **3.2 Orality and Literary Forms in African Philosophy**

This section is geared towards an examination of orality, literacy and writing in relation to African philosophy as technical. This section shall, therefore, examine their merits in enhancing philosophical development in Africa; and perhaps

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.27.

their disadvantages. This is necessitated by the presence of Ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy as trends in contemporary African Philosophy. The sources of these trends purport to be exclusively oral and have been subjected to fervent criticisms by different philosophers. The author endeavours to make an assessment of the intellectual effects of orality, literacy and writing to African philosophy. This relationship and its implication is complex and calls for vast learning, thought and careful statement. Not only are the issues complex but they also engage scholars biases. The author shall therefore, give brief explanations of what both Ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy entail, point out the criticisms levelled against them and make its assessments.

Ethno-philosophy refers to the work of those anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers and philosophers who present the collective worldviews of African peoples, their myths, folklore and folk wisdom as philosophy. Ethno-philosophers try to describe the world outlook or thought system of a particular African community or the whole of Africa. They also stress the communal nature of the African thought and give its emotional appeal as one of the unique features of African thought. Ethno-philosophy, is therefore, criticized on the understanding that its sources were basically oral unsystematic and could not therefore be relied on for lack of verifiable hypothesis. The term philosophy is therefore ambiguous and very broad in analysis. Almost every scholar has a view as to what constitutes philosophy, and therefore, one's conception of philosophy will influence what one accepts as philosophical, both in the broader and narrower sense.



Philosophers should not, therefore, waste much time discrediting Ethno-philosophy but, rather, seek to understand in what sense the term philosophy is being employed in a certain piece of work. Perhaps what Tempels and Mbiti failed to do was to give the etymological and historical context of the term philosophy which could have easily enabled the readers in delineating boundaries of the term as employed in their work. Hence, this should not be a ground in rejecting Ethno-philosophy, instead, Ethno-philosophy should thus be viewed as a spring-board from which more insights into what can count as philosophy in African thought system stand their ground.

Africa had a late start in systematic philosophy but this should not discourage scholars from starting from the root, they must begin with the basics in order that Africans understand themselves. According to Foucault;

All knowledge is rooted in a life, society and a language that have a history; and it is in that very history that knowledge finds the element enabling it to communicate with other forms of life, other types of society and other significations.<sup>99</sup>

In studying African thought, scholars must rely on stories, oral tradition and myths as sources of thought. These materials must be treated on a par with western literature as traditionally considered for purposes of philosophical inquiry. These serve as data for analysis of African philosophical thought, so that when taken together with the analytical writings of other scholars

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<sup>99</sup> Foucault, as quoted in Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa, p. 517.

such as sociologists, anthropologists and historians, scholars will have a substantial basic for their studies.<sup>100</sup>

Sage philosophy or philosophic sagacity, on the other hand, consists of the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom (well-known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths) and didactic wisdom (an expounded wisdom and rational thought of some given individuals within a community).<sup>101</sup>

Oruka has projected his philosophic sagacity as second order to Ethno-philosophy. According to him, philosophic sagacity is the only trend that can give an all-acceptable decisive blow to the position of Ethno-philosophy as it is not impersonal. None of the other two trends (Professional and Nationalist Ideological philosophy) can objectively, decisively play this role, as they are generally suspected of smuggling Western techniques into African philosophy.<sup>102</sup>

All trends play a complementary role, and discrediting other trends is not in line with scholarly pursuits. Philosophers must be open to diversity and criticism, trying to understand diversity of thought, and trying to place it in the context of the whole of philosophy. Only then, will scholars be able to enlarge their conception of what thinking is and as Wright has observed:

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<sup>100</sup> R. Wright, African Philosophy, p. 48.

<sup>101</sup> Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 33.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

We must be willing to look at all views, no matter how diverse and learn what we may from them, even if we learn that a certain view is worthless, we have learned something important, we need to see the openings of new perspectives as an exciting event, rather than a threat.<sup>103</sup>

Ethno-philosophy and philosophic sagacity rely on African oral past in an effort to understand and broaden their perspective on the human enterprise. Plato in the Theateatus advises that, human beings need to engage in philosophical dialogue, no matter where that takes them, no matter what they have to explore to do so, because in the end, only that will allow them to escape from their former selves and become different people.<sup>104</sup> It is by the same token that orality, literacy and writing need to be viewed in relation to African philosophy. The absence or presence of any of those three need not be a hindrance to philosophical development, in Africa.

The above views give the impression that philosophical problems are broad, and more general than those of sciences. They arise outside its own parameter and transcend specialized boundaries. <sup>105</sup> By implication, philosophers can carry out research in different time spans, whether in the oral illiterate past; or the modern literate age, as long as their work or findings have a philosophical grounding. Human knowledge is never fully complete and so the process of learning and inquiry is endless. This should not be taken to mean that the germ behind philosophical inquiry is swept under the carpet. One thing is

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<sup>103</sup> Wright, p. ix.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. x.

<sup>105</sup> Mwaipaya, "The Essential Features Of Philosophy," p.14.

needful in any philosophical inquiry, that, it must be critical, reflective and discursive in character.

This requirement makes it impossible for African Philosophy to dispense with literacy and writing, as they are necessary to its development. Much as writing has its grounding in orality, it nevertheless has played a major role in restructuring thought. It gives permanence to peoples ideas and enables them communicate over great distances. This has in turn brought about profound changes in thought processes, personality and social structures.<sup>106</sup>

Literacy transforms consciousness and this is made possible by the technology of writing. Literacy being employed in its wider sense, as the ability not only to read and write, but, also the ability to study a vast range of materials. Literacy and writing makes study possible, the word study being applied in its strict sense to mean, the application of the mind in order to acquire knowledge of something, to look at critically, examine, inquire into, scrutinize, investigate, to give careful thought and consideration to something.

In other words, writing and literacy enable scholars to be more analytic in their thinking. However, one can argue that, all thought, including that in primary oral cultures, is analytic to some degree, as it breaks its materials into various components. This argument may seem convincing since, societies have existed from time immemorial and have lived and organized their lives even before the advent of writing. It is true that human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form,

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<sup>106</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, p.79.

learn and possess and practice great wisdom, through apprenticeship, listening, repeating what they hear, by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them, but not by study in the strict sense. This kind of learning is what Wiredu refers to as;

traditional philosophy or accumulated wisdom of what might be called the collective mind of our societies, handed down through our ancestors both verbally and behaviorally, including aspects of art, ritual and ceremonial.<sup>107</sup>

However, folk thought can be comprehensive and interesting, but, lack of discursiveness is a drawback. Without argument and clarification, there is strictly no philosophy.

Study and writing have significant relationship, in that, they both help in sequential abstraction, classification and explanatory examination of phenomena or of stated truths. For instance, when observing a given phenomena, one has to write down the findings, analyze them and perhaps classify them in order of their occurrences. This entails the many factors involved in that one phenomenon.

Without any writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials or produce other beautiful and powerful creations. Writing helps in the exchange of ideas far and wide hence enhances orality. By seeing how different people with different cultural backgrounds deal with universal questions, scholars are able to come up with greater understanding and insight. To acquire any knowledge at all, philosophers must be open to diversity of thought, as intercultural exchange of ideas helps in the development of systems of thought. Literacy and

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<sup>107</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p,28

writing are thus necessary for the development of science, philosophy, history, explicative understanding of literature, any art and indeed the explanation of language, including oral speech.<sup>108</sup>

Through writing, human knowledge becomes a continuous process. It moves and lives on, with modifications and adaptations made to it. People are always improving on what was and making new creations, all because writing preserves the ideas of their mentors and this makes it possible for them to go over them again and again. In the words of Bodunrin,

Writing is not a pre-requisite for Philosophy but I doubt whether Philosophy can progress adequately without writing. Had others not written down the sayings of Buddha and Socrates, we would not today, regard them as philosophers for their thoughts would have been lost in the mythological world of proverbs and pithy sayings.<sup>109</sup>

This statement in a way also justifies the fact that the African past ought to be studied. Keita is perhaps explicit in observing that, "although a modern African Philosophy has no need living in the past, it must recognize and perceive it as a necessary support for the analysis and study of modern forms of knowledge."<sup>110</sup>

Both Ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy therefore, need not be rejected on grounds that they are reconstructions of the oral past. Scholars should make a critical appraisal of African traditions in order that they help scholars meet the challenges

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<sup>108</sup> Ong, p,145.

<sup>109</sup> Bodunrin, "Which kind of Philosophy For Africa?" p.1&2

<sup>110</sup> L Keita, "The Questions of Method", in Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 56.

and problems of today. It must be observed that literacy and writing ought to be recommended requirements for any discourse and philosophy is no exception. There must be some means of recording a philosophical system, so that there is evidence of systematic discourse.

By putting much emphasis on literacy and the written word, one is not discrediting the spoken word, but only enhancing it and making it permanent. However, writing has simultaneous usefulness, shortcomings and dangers. The shortcomings of writings have been outlined by Plato in the Phaedrus when he observed that, "writing is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can only be in the mind".<sup>111</sup> This idea is influenced by Plato's theory of ideas and forms, whereby what the mind produces in writing is a copy of the real picture in the mind. He thought that an 'idea' was real as opposed to what that idea brings into being.

Plato felt that writing is a passive way of communication, such that a written text is unresponsive unlike a person who would explain his or her statements. According to him, the written word, could not defend itself as the natural spoken word can; real speech and thought always exist essentially in a context of give and take, between real persons. Spoken utterance is addressed by a real, living person to another, at a specific time in a real setting which always includes much more than mere words. A person can be challenged and made to defend his or her statements. By so doing, one gets the exact rendition of what is said, together with the intonations to determine whether one

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<sup>111</sup> Hamilton, Phaedrus, (274 - 277).

is lively, excited, incensed or resigned. This helps one understand an issue fully though at times a person can deliberately decide to be fake.

Writing has also been regarded as an agent of alienation whereby those who do not know how to read and write are regarded as illiterate or primitive. It brings about divisions in society whereby there is the elite, who are regarded more highly than those who never went to school. These elite are also regarded as policy makers, the cream of society, due to the fact that writing empowers the intellectual activity of each and every person.

Human beings have become more creative, and this is seen mainly in the scientific world, and the technological advances they has achieved. Through writing and literacy, comes the idea of specialization. Different people specialize in different disciplines and this makes knowledge secret and limited. Only those who can read and understand will benefit but for others, they just take it. This is why at first, writing is often regarded as an instrument of secret and magic power. Whereas traditional knowledge is open and broadly shared, modern knowledge acquired through books is more exclusive and therefore seen as secret and exclusive.

All in all, orality, writing and literacy, complement each other and are in relationship. To contend that a great many changes in the psyche and in culture are due to a shift from orality to writing and literacy is not to make them the sole cause of all changes, that is, the connection is not a matter of reductionism but relationism.



Both orality and the growth of literacy out of orality are necessary for the evolution of consciousness. There is no mutual exclusivity between the written and unwritten. What is written can be reported orally and what is oral can be expressed in writing. Writing opens the psyche to the external objective world quite distinct from itself, and, also the interior self against whom the objective is set. This in turn strengthens people's rational powers as they are able to reflect on a wider variety of issues.<sup>112</sup>

Literacy, on the other hand, fosters composition of ideas on paper, and this gives thought different contours from those of orally sustained thought, which is memorized from one generation to another, and is aggregative.<sup>113</sup> What perhaps makes philosophers uncomfortable with is the idea that they come from an orally constituted sensibility and tradition. They are not felt as their objects, but as reconstitution of events in time. Orally presented sequences are always occurrences in time, impossible to examine.

If African Philosophy is to speak for itself in terms of existence and relevance, she cannot escape the requirement that it must be written down, be critical of itself, and discursive in nature. These three factors are also enhanced by literacy. Thought which is the essence and substance of philosophy must have an expression to be considered, analyzed and transmitted.

Without writing, African Philosophy would not have emerged as a discipline for discussion. It was only after the contact

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<sup>112</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, p. 9.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.11.

with other literature about Africa, that, scholars were ignited towards finding an African philosophy to correct the colonial mentality about the incapability of the African to think logically and rationally. African Philosophy cannot therefore dispense with other philosophies, it must take note of them, study them and make an analysis. Wiredu sums it thus:

The African philosopher writing today has no choice but to conduct his philosophical inquiries in relation to the Philosophical writings of other people, for his own ancestors left him no heritage of philosophical writing. He must of necessity study the written philosophies of other lands, because it would be extremely injudicious for him to try to philosophize in self-imposed isolation from all modern currents of thought. <sup>114</sup>

The question that ought to be posed is, what then, should be the starting point of African philosophy? After scholars have read about other philosophies, the immediate answer that is given is that, African philosophers imitate or try to find some Western concepts in an African setting, to justify their philosophical trend. This kind of approach is complex, due to language barriers. However, scholars must begin with the African worldview, as the basis for black experience, that is, African philosophy must borrow a lot from other worldwide philosophies

When scholars speak of the African worldview, they speak of the collective heritage, culture, traditions or customs. Men and women are at the centre of this worldview, they are the actors who beget and control this culture. Hence, when studying the African worldview, scholars must begin with human beings as philosophy is thought about thought.

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<sup>114</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and an African Culture, p. 33.

According to Masolo, a philosopher must begin from

Man to find meaning and truth, and that man by definition is already a rational man, a cultural being, a deliberating being whose activities have an abstract level of deliberation, the level of meaning and purpose. This is the man the philosopher presupposes and with whom he must begin in his quest for meaning and truth.<sup>115</sup>

From the foregoing, Sage Philosophy can be justified as it deals with individual men and women in a given society. These men and women, Oruka divides them into two groups such that, there exists the Philosophic sage and folk sage. The philosophic sage as opposed to the folk sage, is rationally critical and recommends only those aspects of the beliefs and wisdom that satisfy his or her rational scrutiny. He/she also offers alternatives to the commonly accepted opinions and practices. A folk sage on the other hand, has a great deal of knowledge about ordinary matter of fact, but lacks the balance and maturity and ripe insight to rise above common beliefs.<sup>116</sup>

In an attempt to study the African worldview, scholars must not throw caution to the wind. They need to proceed as Hountondji advises, with a clear and open mind.

. They should not imprison ourselves in an imaginary dialogue with Europe. We need to re-evaluate our cultures without enslaving ourselves to them. We should make a critical appraisal of our traditions in order that they help us meet the challenges and problems of today, by establishing the contribution our traditional systems of thought can bring to bear on our modern ways of thinking.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Masolo in Oruka, Philosophy and Cultures, p. 50.

<sup>116</sup> Oruka, Sage Philosophy, p. 48.

<sup>117</sup> Hountondji, "Reason and Tradition", in Oruka & Masolo, Philosophy & Cultures. pp. 136-137.

Hountondji goes on to observe that:

the study of culture should not content itself with a static painting of a given society, at a given time, it must also consider the place of change within this society, its own movement and dynamism.<sup>118</sup>

Philosophically speaking, no culture is static, all cultures are dynamic and progress in different directions. By the same token, African philosophy is not an exception, it is also a continuous process and should be open to criticisms and change. Hence, it should not be locked up in a dialogue with Europe trying to justify itself at the expense of her development.

African philosophy cannot, therefore, dispense with orality, writing and literacy. It has to make use of all, orality being its foundation. This is because knowledge develops from stage to stage, and so does human society, which has been developing from one stage of consciousness to another; from primary oral cultures to literate ones. Many of the features scholars have taken for granted in thought and expression among the literate, are not directly native to human existence as such, but, have come into being because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to human consciousness. This brings the author to the discussion on problems of philosophy and their effects on African Philosophy.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

This Chapter treats the question of content, in trying to establish what need comprise the content and subject matter for African Philosophy. We shall first examine some of the characteristics of Philosophy and then look at the philosophical problems.

The question whether, there is an African Philosophy prompts one to search for its sources, and the answers given may be characterized by vagueness and ambiguity. As noted earlier, the term African Philosophy is broad, such that it may be applied to aspects of reality that are quite far apart and even contrasting.<sup>119</sup> Besides, the term is vague in the sense that, the limits of its applicability may not be clear. It may for instance, refer to the aliens who have been born and reared in Africa, or to the indigenious black people of the African continent or to African Americans.

It is, therefore, important that boundaries are drawn concerning the sense of philosophy that is implied in any piece of work. In this work, the term is applied in its specific or narrow sense; as technical and not as a way of life. Philosophy as technical, is thus, a reflection presenting precise characteristics of being explicit, analytical, critical and autocritical, systematic, open, bearing on experience, human conditions, significations as well as the values that it reveals.

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<sup>119</sup> Nyasani, Philosophical Focus on Culture & Traditional Thought Systems in Development, p. 328.

These characteristics are what to a great extent determine the content of any philosophical discourse. As an explicit discourse, Philosophy is more individualistic than collective. Philosophizing begins when an individual person or people are dissatisfied with the traditions or cultural norms, and causes them to work on the collective world retrieving it, questioning it, giving it a new interpretation and meaning.<sup>120</sup> Thus philosophy is a product of an individual mind, it is not implicit, or communal.

This line of thought explains why professional philosophy insists that African Philosophy is work or literature produced by individual African Philosophers on various philosophical problems or issues. According to Hountondji, "African Philosophy does exist but in a new sense, as literature produced by Africans and dealing with philosophical problems"<sup>121</sup>

The author concurs with the above views and perhaps, what could be made clear is the fact that an alien who has lived in Africa and developed an interest in philosophical problems on the continent can rightly produce work that can be incorporated in African Philosophy. It is the thoughts and reflections of these individual thinkers which gradually filter into society and later become widely disseminated in a community to the extent that it may then be described as the Greek, Western or African Philosophy. Any analysis requires its object and the object of analysis is that which constitutes its content; hence an

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<sup>120</sup> J. G. Mbae, in Nyasani, p.428.

<sup>121</sup> Hountondji, African Philosophy, p. 33.

individual has to speculate or make reflections on an issue in his society. It should be pointed out, however, that every civilization has its own preoccupation, and problems which are peculiar to it, including the mode of handling these problems. As such, the African past cannot adequately serve as the only proper content for African Philosophy as new experience is always appearing.

Every civilization also has its limits of knowledge, perceptions, reactions, feelings and ideas. The experience of any moment has its horizon. Today's experience, which is not tomorrow's has in it some hints and implications which are tomorrow on the horizon of today. Each person's experience may be added to by the experience of other people, who are living in his/her day or have lived before, and so a common world of experience larger than that of their own observation can be lived in by other people. But however wide it may be, that common world also has its horizon and on that horizon new experience always paints itself.

The formulation of experience which is contained within the intellectual horizon of an age and society is thus determined, not so much by events and desires, as by the basic concepts at a people's disposal for analyzing and describing their adventures to their own understanding. Such concepts arise as they are needed to deal with political or domestic experience, but the same experience could be seen in many different lights.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> W. Ong, Orality and Literacy, p. 102. See also Mudimbe. The Surreptitious of Speech, p. 229.

From the foregoing, it is evident that Philosophy is dynamic, evolving with time, and African Philosophy is no exception. This is clearly summed up by Wiredu when he writes,

African Philosophy as distinct from African traditional world-views is the philosophy that is being produced by Contemporary African philosophers. It is still in the making.<sup>123</sup>

Through interaction with the rest of the world, contemporary inquirers, have a wealth of concepts and formulative notions with which, they encounter experience due to technological and intellectual advancement. Human beings today are scientifically inclined in their attitudes and ways of thinking than their foreparents. African Philosophy, cannot, therefore, be a communal activity, implicit or collective; rather, it is explicit. Hence, African customs, traditions and myths can only be taken as subject matter for philosophical study, but they are not themselves Philosophy as such. They may be instrumental in the generation of knowledge claims, but, they do not in themselves validate knowledge claims.

A mature Philosophy is also characterized by reflection on experience to search for the underlying meaning and principles that can guide one's life. As such, issues are not taken by their face value but rather they are tested and analyzed critically. Before an issue is accepted or rejected, all aspects pertaining to it must be examined. Nothing is taken as gospel truth or for granted. In this sense, philosophy defies received opinion, traditions and religion as the sole source of knowledge.

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<sup>123</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.36.



Philosophy is both critical and autocritical (self-critical). This implies that, it questions not only the methods of other disciplines but also its very own. It is vital that it looks inside itself for solutions to problems it deals or is faced with. This enables it to be both subjective and objective. African Philosophy should therefore question its own methods, the collective image of the African people, and their world-view. Only then will it avoid prejudices and misconceptions. All issues need, therefore, be approached by a critical mind or attitude, so as to enable one break with what is simply given, in the pursuit of that which is specific and essential to him.

Besides, Philosophy is systematic and comprehensive. It is systematic in the sense that, it is scientific owing to its logical methodology. It is comprehensive in its attempts to create systems or complete worldviews in which all people's experiences find expression and meaning. This is due to the fact that it deals with both individual or particular circumstances and universals. This in turn affords it the quality of being open, bearing on human experiences and conditions.<sup>124</sup>

These qualities or characteristics of philosophy clearly delineates its scope. The fact that philosophy is explicit and open broadens its scope, cannot be limited to any particular horizon. As such, philosophical problems are not confined to a particular area of study or to a particular subject matter, they arise outside its own parameters. Philosophical problems transcend specialized boundaries making them more general and

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<sup>124</sup> J. Mbae, in Nyasani, p. 437.

...per. African Philosophy being interested in the evolution of ideas, requires an indefinite time span.

In this sense, the subject matter of Philosophy can be said to be the whole world of reality.<sup>125</sup> It is located in the attempt of understanding the human condition of life and speculating about the nature of the universe. These objects of analysis are what later count as the content.

From the foregoing, it becomes evident that African Philosophy need not confine itself to problems affecting only the continent, but the whole world. It should treat any subject, as it primarily aims at knowledge, the kind which results from critical examination of the grounds of its convictions, prejudices and beliefs. This will in turn enlarge its conception of what is possible, and what thinking itself is all about. The fact that philosophical problems are wide in scope, does not imply that philosophy aims at the construction of a universal theory of reality, rather, it is essentially an attempt to systematize worldviews and traditional beliefs to determine the firmness of their foundation.

In the following paragraphs, the author critically examine what has been suggested as the proper content for African Philosophy. This issue need, not be controversial, because as we have already stated, African Philosophy has an indefinite time span as it is interested in the history of the development of ideas or knowledge, and its subject matter is broad.

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<sup>125</sup> Broad, C. D., Scientific Thought, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1923, pp. 146-156.

African past, it is been argued by some philosophers such as Odelela, Keita, Oruka, as comprising the content for African Philosophy. Since the history of African ideas does not commence today, one should search for African Philosophy it in the past, as it is the past, that presupposes the present and the future. In this case, the reappraisal of African traditional culture is not harmful as all knowledge is rooted in a life, a society and a language that have a history. Africans' past history and forms of knowledge more often than not, come to the present generation through oral stories, customs, myths and folklore. However, it is the task of a modern inquirer, philosopher to retrieve it, question it, give it a new interpretation and meaning, write it down and provide other scholars with considerable literature.

Philosophy begins with wonder and the universe provides human beings with sources of wonder. According to Aristotle;

It is through wonder that men now and originally began to philosophize, wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about greater matters too - about changes of the moon and the sun (the phenomena of death, growth, decay and purpose of life).<sup>126</sup>

Much as the whole world of reality provides scholars with philosophical problems, it nevertheless requires someone to reflect on them, analyze them and record them down for the purpose of dissemination and refinement, through debate. It is in this sense that African Philosophy becomes explicit and not implicit.

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<sup>126</sup> R. Allen., (Ed.), Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle, New York, Free Press, 1966, p.285.

According to Olela, the subject matter of African Philosophy must emerge from within the tradition. "Mythical accounts," he observed;

Ought to be analyzed, criticized, reflected upon codified or synthesized into theories. There is need to tackle oral literature, myths and maxims, from which a philosopher will obtain texts from which an interpretation, reconstruction and synthesis may be extracted.<sup>127</sup>

The above views carry the implication that, when studying African thought, one must rely on stories, oral tradition, ritual and social institutions as purveyors of thought. These serve as data for analysis of African philosophical thought and these materials need to be treated on a par with literature as traditionally considered for purposes of philosophical inquiry. The thought of the African people is intrinsically valuable and should be studied.

Although modern African Philosophy has no need living in the past, it must, however, recognize it and perceive it as a necessary support for the analysis and study of modern forms of knowledge. Does not African background play part in how one sees today and tomorrow? The present and the future are made available or possible by the past.

It should be pointed out, that any reconstruction of African past must examine features of their thought systems and society that made this possible. It must also consider the forces of change within society, its own movement and dynamism. This is due to the fact that every society meets new ideas with its own concepts, its own tacit fundamental way of seeing things, its own questions, and its peculiar curiosity. Theories have changed and

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<sup>127</sup> H. Olela, "Approach to African Philosophy." p. 20.

what worked in the past cannot really account for today. For instance, scientific explanations have surpassed mythical explanations. People living today have a wealth of concepts or formulative notions with which the mind meets experience.

Philosophy is usually interested in the development of thought, which normally has ideas and takes place in human beings. Through the thought process, human beings are able to adapt their environment and change it to suit himself themselves. As rational beings, human beings deliberates on experiences they encounter establish a culture, laws and system of government. It is in this light that, any kind of study should have the human person as its object of study, since all the discoveries and recommendations made, are aimed at benefitting human beings or improving their lot. Masolo observes that:

Philosophy, in order to remain Philosophy must begin with "I" humanite del l'homme, from man the essential to a man the existential... It must explore the incognito - Philosophy is thought about thought.<sup>128</sup>

In order to find meaning and truth, Philosophy must begin from human beings who are rational, deliberating and cultural beings. They exist and continue to exist, therefore the study of humanity does not entail only the present but also the past. Thought has been evolving from one generation to another, from primary oral cultures, to the modern scientific and literate stage.

African Philosophers, should not, therefore, shun or shy away from studying traditional African thought systems. Philosophy of some kind is involved in the thought and action of

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<sup>128</sup> D. A. Masolo, "Philosophy and Culture: A Critique" in H. Oruka, & D. A. Masolo, (Ed.), Philosophy and Culture, p. 50.

every people and constitutes the sheet anchor of their life in its totality. Also, Philosophy as a love for wisdom is concerned with the search for the wisdom needed to form the basis for a satisfactory way of life.

African collective heritage can shed some light in the modern world, and this is why it requires professional investigation into its fundamental ideas and general principles.

Hountondji expresses similar views when he observes that:

There exists a considerable body of oral literature, esoteric or exoteric, the importance of which we are only beginning to suspect. We must have the patience to study it, analyze it, investigate its logic, its functions and its merit.<sup>129</sup>

Philosophers should not just be content with describing or reconstructing the logic inherent in their customs but they must identify the fundamental ideas and principles that can be of importance to the development of knowledge. In so doing, they can improve their own lot by learning from mistakes of the past and also by improving on what was in existence before, as times have changed and we have many concepts and notions with which to approach reality.

They need, however, to proceed with the understanding that different minds may take the same event in different ways, depending on their orientation in terms of experience, environment and level of intellectual and technological development. As such, they should not be quick to dismiss some forms of thought as backward or useless without studying them deeply.

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<sup>129</sup> Hountondji, African Philosophy, p.168.

Throughout history, human beings have desired to know the explanation of things and the experiences they interact with, and philosophy arose out of the desire to understand the basic principle underlying human existence and life in general. It is the desire to understand that has seen the human society develop from fervent mythology and dogmatism to rationality, science and technology. Therefore, it will be unfair for scholars to judge ahead of time that the prescientific age has nothing philosophical to offer. One stage of thought presupposes the next and so one cannot do without the other.

There is need however, to proceed objectively when dealing with any form of thought, and Hountondji's caution is worth noting here, as regards scholars' attitude towards the African collective heritage on:

How to respond to the challenges of cultural imperialism without imprisoning ourselves in an imaginary dialogue with Europe, how to re-evaluate our cultures without enslaving ourselves to them, how to restore the dignity of our past, without giving room to a passeistic attitude. Instead of blindly condemning our traditions on behalf of reason, or rejecting the latter on behalf of the former or making an absolute of the internal rationality of these traditions as they were, beyond mythology and distortion, not merely for the purposes of self-identification or justification, but in order to help us meet the challenges and problems of today.<sup>130</sup>

In sum, African Philosophy needs to be objective so as to steer clear of prejudice and bias. It must be realistic and open to responsible criticism. The task of the modern African Philosopher should not entail dealing only with the consequences of colonialism in African societies and culture, but should also

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<sup>130</sup> P. Hountondji, "Reason and Tradition" in Oruka H. and Masolo D. A., Philosophy and Cultures, p. 136.

enlarge its scope to study the challenges of industrialization and modernization. It must, however, take cognizance of the contemporary situation by giving conceptual interpretation to contemporary experience.

African Philosophy concerns human experience and it would make much more useful contributions if it sought to help resolve questions or problems that arise from social, economic, political and the technological arena. It can also illuminate on some of the economic policies, social institutions and political ideologies and perhaps enlist their strengths and weaknesses, then, posit new and better ones if possible.

By schooling himself/herself in different philosophies, an African Philosopher can be able to formulate ideas and theories pertinent to the African condition and which can be used as a source of reference in systems of government, resolving social conflicts, understanding nature and the general search for knowledge that can help in the improvement of life. African Philosophy ought therefore, to enlarge its boundaries of study and tackle issues that affect the whole world, it should reflect on a variety of human experiences.

To do Philosophy, scholars must be open to diversity of thought, trying to place it in the context of the whole of Philosophy.<sup>131</sup> By so doing, they shall come along with a greater understanding and insight on human thought and knowledge.

Philosophy as the study of human thought and experiences should, therefore, be a continual process of finding solutions to human problems, as human beings are active and initiating

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<sup>131</sup> R. Wright, African Philosophy: An Introduction, p.30.



agents, riding the wave of the present as it were, deliberating among open alternatives to reach decisions regarding the many different phases of their life. In this sense, Philosophy is not impotent as the world of experiences presents it with new problems everyday.

It is in view of this that scholars hold to the conviction that every kind of thought should be studied. Philosophy then requires an indefinite time span since knowledge and thought are as old as humanity. The past creates both limitations and potentialities and always conditions the present. Whatever kind of knowledge one seeks after is geared towards an understanding and improvement of human life. Knowledge in whatever form should be seen not only as a means to an end, but, also to an end in itself. In the next Chapter, the author seeks to analyze African Philosophy and its conceptual analysis.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Most scholars such as Oruka, Nyasani, Mbae, were of the view that African Philosophy has to begin with definitions, if it has to exhibit some scientific value of being systematic and coherent. Every concept used in discourse for communication must have a meaning capable of being indicated.

Philosophy being a conceptual activity, that employs concepts and abstractions by means of which it formulates laws and theories, must begin with definitions. The process of definition will enable one understand the constituents of a given concept or fact, and how they are related.<sup>132</sup> In so doing, people's knowledge and understanding of facts will be enlarged.

The process of definition will further enable African Philosophers to distinguish between kinds of knowledge; that is, knowledge based on to the inspection and the interpretation of facts. Knowledge deals with the power of the mind to grasp the distinction between the particular and the universal.

To avoid ambiguity and vagueness of African Philosophy, a distinction has to be made to expose the complex constituents that characterize the term and their relationship. Such a distinction is important in clarifying the misconceptions and misunderstandings among scholars of African Philosophy.

A definition is also vital as it will determine the status of African Philosophy in relation to the general discipline of

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<sup>132</sup> A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, Oxford, 1936, p.51.

Philosophy. Thus, African Philosophy ought to be defined in such a way that it exhibits elements of universality.

African Philosophy as a universal intellectual discipline ought to be critical, highly reflective and scientific in its outlook. It must take cognizance of the power of reason by reflecting upon African customs, beliefs and dogmas. After all, philosophy begins when there is doubt about cherished beliefs and traditional ways of thinking or explaining away things.

The element of doubt is what sends a scholar out to retrieve and question the underlying substance of such thinking to establish whether their grounds are rationally defensible. This is what entails a mature Philosophy.

Philosophy in its particular or popular sense is always someone's, somewhen and somewhere. This is Philosophy that guides a people's way of life and thinking. In this case, every kind of thought is a kind of Philosophy, and everyone, a philosopher.<sup>133</sup> This kind of philosophy arises out of the desire to adapt to one's environment.

African Philosophy as an intellectual discipline should, thus, entail the characteristics of being critical and objective so as to check against prejudice. It ought to question and analyze the African collective image, common sense and worldview.

African Philosophy as an intellectual discipline with a universal cognition ought to adopt a method that is objective and highly critical. Though the subjects or areas that receive priority may be different, the methodology has to be formulated in such a way that it exhibits some accepted characteristics.

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<sup>133</sup> Pierce, "Four Approaches to Philosophy", in Gould, P.34.

It should be noted that African Philosophy cannot be totally original and a method that is authentically African cannot possibly be attained. This is due to the fact that scholars of African Philosophy have a Western orientation in Philosophy and it is only natural that they will study their own thought using the modes of Western Philosophy before they formulate their own.

A method that is highly objective will ensure that no stone is left unturned. This in turn checks against the apologetic attitude that most of African Philosophers have been prey to. By being objective, one will be able to make out what is merely knowledge based on superstition and tradition and knowledge that is certain and dependable.

Objectivity will ensure that African Philosophers do not just laud African traditional philosophy because they want to prove to the world that theirs is superior and unique to other philosophies. Rather, it will give African Philosophers the courage to stand up against that which is not objective and retrogressive in African thought systems and traditions, and accept those elements that have some value in them. This will further ensure that there is no middle ground, hence, one will be proud of his/her philosophy. Objectivity also allows for generalization and comparisons. One will take each philosophy or thought in its own integrity, study it, analyze it, sought out generalizations and then make comparisons with other philosophies and systems of thought.

African Philosophy also ought to adopt a method that is highly critical of itself. This is because the critical method is vital in clarifying the foundations of knowledge and their

valuation. This method stresses the analysis of concepts, statements, theories and sentences to determine their meanings.<sup>134</sup> Since philosophy is a conceptual activity, an analysis of language is important because it is made up of concepts, statements and sentences.

Thought in whatever form ought to be subjected to critical analysis. African philosophers have to establish the context in which such thought was expressed or put forth, the meaning and sense in which the concepts involved are used. By grasping the meaning and context in which concepts or terms have been used, one is able to steer clear of blurred thoughts which are necessitated by the vagueness and ambiguity of certain terms.

Knowledge being a universal trait in every human society, has been communicated to different parts of the world through the technology of writing, electronic media and printing. This art of communication of different kinds of knowledge has seen humanity progress from pre-scientific age right through the scientific age. Exchange of ideas has led to the improvement of the human society and its development.

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<sup>134</sup> Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, p.33.

a wider conception of their thinking and their relatedness to each other.

As such, to be progressive, African Philosophy must employ the comparative method. This method will ensure that it examines itself against other philosophies in an attempt to acquire a universal philosophical cognition. The more extensive human beings' knowledge of what has been done, the greater will be their power of thinking what to do.

When executing this method, one should be aware of the fact that each philosophy may have developed from a different motive. Besides, the cultural and historical conditions in which they developed are different. Hence, the interrelationship must be made clear between the cognition areas of individual philosophies. For instance, if it entails matters of language, or translation, the translation must be symmetrical.<sup>135</sup>

The comparative method also acts as a watchdog by providing checks and balances, this will ensure that scholars arrive at a reliable knowledge whereby mere superstition would be separated from well substantiated belief or knowledge. As a result, their worldviews and cultural beliefs will find their refinement in their ability to analyze and observe the prevailing situation.

Contemporary African Philosophy is faced with the challenges and pressures of the modern society. It cannot ignore the growth and influence of sciences and technology that are taking place in the contemporary world. Rapid modernization has really affected most academic disciplines that shape the society and so a re-examination of their tenets is paramount. Most people in

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<sup>135</sup> Wiredu, Philosophy and An African Culture, p.48.

society today are scientifically inclined especially in their ways of thinking and acting, they employ the scientific methods about a great many things, and only cease using them when they do not know how to apply it.

The scientific method requires that knowledge claims put forth must be capable of confirmation or disconfirmation at least indirectly or to some degree on the part of any person properly equipped with intelligence and technical devices. By the same measure, knowledge - claims put forth by scholars of African Philosophy ought to be subjected to a critical and detailed argument to determine their validity.

This implies that African Philosophy must keep a diary of its memoirs.<sup>136</sup> Writing then becomes a necessary requirement for African Philosophy. By recording down its memoirs, African Philosophical thought will be disseminated and read widely by those equipped with intelligence in an effort to study them, and analyze them. Unless it is written, African Philosophic thought would not benefit anyone. Having an idea, and expressing it, are two different things. An idea is supposed to, and, is destined to produce another idea. Unless African Philosophy expresses its ideas in writing, it shall not be able to produce other Philosophical theories.. When thoughts are expressed in whatever form, different people will react and take them in different ways and this explains the growth of knowledge. By going through other people's ideas or thoughts, one builds his/her own and the chain reaction goes on and on.

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<sup>136</sup> Hountondji, African Philosophy, p.33.

As concerns the question of content, most sentiments advocated the whole world of reality as the subject matter of African Philosophy, which must reflect on a variety of human experiences. It should permeate all spheres of life in the society. Hence, African Philosophy should be seen in light of Plato's Republic. That is, scholars of African Philosophy need to tackle issues of government, education, family and religion, which happen to be vital institutions in society.

These institutions ought to be studied and analyzed in light of the African situation. African Philosophers would do better if they studied the conception of man, society, good and evil, ideas of law and government and the doctrines of God. This rests on the understanding that Philosophy of some kind is involved in the thought and action of every people and it is the task of the modern inquirer to retrieve it, question it, make an interpretation and record it down for analysis by other scholars.

This will ensure that thought systems find their refinement. Knowledge - claims that are not well substantiated will be discarded for those that are valid and certain. Such knowledge - claims can then be incorporated into the modern systems of thought. Professional investigation into fundamental ideas and general principles of the pre-scientific era, will go a long way in helping humanity find solutions to the problems resulting from colonialism, imperialism and industrialisation.

African Philosophers have to squarely face the challenges of modernization and industrialization to establish ways and means in which society can adjust and adapt itself to such changes and challenges. They ought to philosophize with the



contemporary situation in mind, by giving conceptual interpretation to contemporary experience.

The scientific way of thinking pervades people's way of perceiving and performing certain activities. People are more interested in the practical value of things than the intrinsic value. The high technology of electronics, the print media has resulted in people discarding their old-fashioned thinking or worldviews that were dominated by knowledge that was more dependent on dogmas and doctrines.

It is evident then that the modes inherited from the past cannot stand unshaken in the world today. Thus African Philosophy must also be a continuous process of finding workable solutions to problems brought about by such changes and influences of science and technology on society. It has no choice but to speak relevantly to the situation faced by its own people. African Philosophers could, therefore, philosophize with a plurality of African visions and address themselves to the African problematic. Hence, they should seek to resolve questions raised by the African historians, political scientist, technologist and economists.

The dictum, 'charity begins at home', is very relevant to African Philosophy. Before looking elsewhere, it must begin with the thought of its own people. It has to critically examine the forms and categories of thinking or human thought among her own peoples, in order to fix bounds of possible knowledge and necessary ignorance.

Language is important and central to Philosophy because it is the expression of thought, and since Philosophy defines its

major task as the study of thought, verbal discussion becomes vital to philosophical activity. There is need also to study their African languages in search of philosophical elements. Once discovered, they can be described carefully and compared with others. This is due to the fact that thought, takes place in a language and this language takes the form of phrases, terms and statements. In order that scholars may understand the thought of a given people, it is vital that they study their concepts in order that they may know and understand their categories of thought.

The study of language will also expose the concepts at a people's disposal, since language is flexible, those concepts that people lack can be added to from somewhere, or another language and this is not harmful as long as people can comprehend the meaning. However, African Philosophy cannot afford to be passive concerning universal philosophical problems. It should also tackle problems that are universal, make an analysis and give solutions. New experiences are forever painting themselves on the horizon, thus making knowledge as humanity truly endless.

Every period of human existence has its own peculiar problems to tackle. Thus African Philosophy cannot stick to the old methods or habits, although more often than not, the past determines how one acts and thinks today. As such, no period in history is irrelevant but provides scholars with the foundation on which to build the future. African history, to a large extent, determines how Africans rule themselves, organize their societies and systems of education. They are able to forecast the future to some degree of certainty basing their judgement on

what happened in the past. African Philosophers can, therefore, tackle any philosophical problem that comes their way. The history of human thought is infinite and thus a line of demarcation cannot be drawn as to where it commences and where it ends.

In its innocent state a thought is not philosophy as such unless it is worked on by a professional philosopher. It is this virgin thought that a philosopher questions, reflects on in an effort to identify and establish philosophical abstractions from it. Hence, a critique of African thought systems is not meant to discredit them but rather to strengthen them, by subjecting them to accepted methods of philosophy. Thus, unless one works on them, scholars cannot know them and study them as pure philosophical thoughts, therefore, all thoughts must be regarded as a likely source of philosophy, but cannot be accepted without a critical analysis of its argumentations.

With the interiorization of writing, abstract, sequential classificatory and explanatory examination of phenomena is made possible. Philosophers can analyze the stated phenomenon, compare it, accept it or reject it on the basis of what they know and have studied in other pieces of work. It is, therefore, important that African Philosophers record down their thoughts or analysis on whatever topic they bring forward. This will provide the future generations with texts and literature from which to make analysis. The presence of a library or books makes study possible. The more extensive one's knowledge of what has been done, the greater will be his/her power of knowing what to do.

In conclusion, it should be noted that African Philosophy consists in the works of contemporary African Philosophers tackling different philosophical problems, firmly linked to the academic structures that guarantee institutionally accepted philosophical practices. This philosophy is also rooted in the wisdom of the sages whose knowledge of the cosmos, God, man and society was always enshrined in their stories, proverbs, songs and dances, riddles and folktales. In the next few pages, the author will discuss and analyse the importance of this philosophic sagacity and what influence it has on the written African Philosophy.

### **5.1 Philosophic Sagacity**

It is difficult to refute that men and women of profound wisdom, who think deeper about fundamental issues and questions, exist in many parts of the world. The universe provides human beings with sources of wonder - the phenomena of death, good and evil, growth and decay, meaning and purpose of life. Human beings everywhere have pondered over these questions and have generally found answers to them. Life in a society is organized according to accepted, correct and true answers to fundamental questions about the universe and human beings' place in it.

The thoughts of wise men and women later filter into society gradually and become widely disseminated in a community to the extent that it may be described as the 'Philosophy' of a given people. A people's customs, social life and religious observances are pervaded by their worldview or outlook. It, therefore, becomes necessary that customs, social life and religious observances of a people are studied and analyzed to determine

their firmness. Sagacity and Philosophy are two different forms of activity, but both are under Philosophy. Whereas the philosopher is essentially rational, critical and logically analytic in arriving at general conclusions, the sage employs direct personal intuition. As such, the difference between a sage and a philosopher is not that one is imaginative and the other unimaginative, rather, it is that the philosopher submits his speculations to the discipline of close criticism.

Therefore, the project of philosophic sagacity or sage philosophy should not be viewed negatively, rather, it should be perceived as an inquiry into the fundamental ideas and principles that governed the thought and life of the past African societies or communities. Sage Philosophy, seeks to establish whether orality could actualize real factual texts and precise knowledge which once well understood, could be produced and enshrined in the frame of philosophic discourse.

By interviewing sages from different parts of Kenya, the author found out that, sages possess a greater understanding of human life even though they are neither systematic theorists or analysts, therefore, a critical philosopher should be interested in establishing how truth about fundamental ideas is expressed in diversity. The study therefore, enlarges one's conception of what is possible, it also enriches intellectual imagination and diminishes the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation.

African philosophers need to engage in philosophical dialogue, no matter where it takes them, to what they have to explore to do so, in order that they may understand what there

is, and in so doing broaden their own perspectives on human enterprise. Much as the sources of sage philosophy are oral, it is no doubt that the thoughts of the sages are intrinsically valuable, as they develop out of the desire to understand and not the practical utility that knowledge might possess.

Much as the original thoughts of the sages come to African philosophers in a mixed jumble and are available to us rather haphazardly, there is need to study their history and development. Only then, will they take some kind of order and start to mean more to the scholars. It is therefore, the task of the modern inquirer or philosopher to systematize them, classify them and codify them into philosophical theories.

To insist that writing is a prerequisite in the process of producing a Philosophy, is to wrongfully limit the sources. It implies that Africans have to be indifferent to traditional Africa, and to refine their philosophical ability and understanding, be uninfluenced by the thoughts and languages developed in traditional Africa. African philosophers cannot undermine the importance of the written word nor the oral neither the spoken word, but it should be made clear that the two play complementary roles to each other. Orality has existed long before the written word, throughout history, people were thinking and everything we do begins with a thought. Human beings used to think before they could write or draw; hence the real history of thought would start in what is called pre-historic time. Therefore, a philosopher's interest in an unfamiliar way of thinking is in making it as a means of enlarging his/her conception of what thinking itself is.

However, any reconstruction of the past must examine features of African thought systems and society that made this possible, as we are living in totally different situations and circumstances. For instance, the society today is more open than a century ago due to the improved systems of mass communication. Science has taken its toll and most customs and traditions of the old have been discarded. New religious thoughts have emerged and, all these factors have influenced the society and the existing sages are no exception.

Most of the African sages have either been converted to Christianity, Islam or other religions. Their thoughts about God /Allah and the role of religion in society have a taint of modernity. For them, the role of religion (Kumusambwa)<sup>137</sup> has shifted from teaching generations about their ancestors or genealogies, and their worship; to being a caretaker of the hearts of men and women. It must be observed that it is not compulsory as in old days where one was born into it and had to uphold it everywhere he/she went. Most homes do not have the shrines (Namwima)<sup>138</sup> where libation would be poured out for the departed ones and other spirits; most of the African families do not have the 'central fire place' where knowledge can be imparted to the youth/younger generation.

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<sup>137</sup> Kamusumbwa in Luhya refers to a people's religion, their devotion rituals, in relation to an object of worship.

<sup>138</sup> Namwima is a shrine, whereby food & libation are offered to the living dead during circumcision or any memorial ceremony. (Discussions with Jacob Sikuku, Rebecca Maruti, Mrs. R. Otunga and the late J. Muchocho, and E. Walukhu, 1995).

For African Sages, the marvels of science are equated with "magic", something they cannot understand or comprehend. The growth and decay of the modern society is attributed to the swiftness and craftiness of the young generation. Their blood is as hot as the noon day sun and are always in a hurry to see the fruits of their labour which are sometimes disastrous. Most of the evil things happening are usually blamed on the Whiteman whom the Bukusu people of Western Kenya refer to as 'Wele Weluchi'. They claim that, it is the Whiteman who has brought about the filth, emptied it in a river and it has slowly been flowing to all parts of the continent, causing sickness, fighting among people of the same families and nations, it is the whiteman who has brought about drought and famine due to his smoke pipes, aeroplanes and trains.

The Sages are distraught that people have been depending on the rivers polluted by the Whiteman's god unknowingly and now suffer from the effects. They drink the water together with the frog layers and now the frogs or toads keep on troubling them in their bellies and so they are always restless. Here, the sages are referring to the effects of science and the Western culture and how Africans have aped some characteristics or values that are destroying the African Continent.

However, African Sages do not deny the triumphs of science. They are of the view that some of African traditional medicines be taken up for research as some of these medicines cannot cure certain diseases. Thus, by the turn of the century, most of the sages will be thinking no less than the contemporary thinkers. Their thoughts are not very original as such, but then there is



still need to study them as a source of wisdom and knowledge among the African people. Hence there is a relationship between the written and orally spoken philosophy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.

Having studied African Philosophy, its definition, content, methodology and its germainness in society, the author recommends the following:

African Philosophy has to be distinguished from traditional African Philosophy. It ought to be construed in a sense that implies, it is an intellectual activity given to serious discussion of issues affecting humanity and the universe.

African Philosophy as an academic discipline, should be charged with an active and critical search for truth and meaning about humanity and the universe. It ought to study myths, traditions, and customs, as instruments in the generation of knowledge claims. By critically appraising them, it can be able to formulate fundamental ideas and principles in them, and re-interpret them to establish whether they can make any contributions to modern ways of thought.

African Philosophy being suspended between two traditions of Philosophy namely, the African and Western Culture, ought to adopt a highly critical and objective method of analysis to check against prejudice. It should also be self-critical, diligently and constantly taking stock of itself, in order to know how it looks like, to ensure a true basis for development and improvement.

African Philosophy ought to philosophize with a plurality of African visions, taking into consideration the fact that, the Western mode of Philosophy is not the only form possible. Knowledge is not a monopoly of any one group, hence, philosophizing should never mean forcing the reality through the

mould of Western thought patterns. African Philosophy ought therefore, identify its own variables and study them.

African Philosophy as a universal activity should enhance and encourage critical thinking in all aspects of life. It should acquaint itself with new paths, as it is the nature of life everywhere to outgrow its present and its past.

### CONCLUSION

For a long time now, African Philosophy has been approached by dragging feet. The debate on nature, scope, aims and character of African Philosophy continues to occupy scholars, at the expense of new developments taking place.

By revolving around the same questions, African Philosophy, seems to have lost its vision of breaking up the dead crust of tradition and convention, and the fetters which bind it to inherited preconceptions, so as to attain new and broader ways of looking at things.

This study has assisted in locating some of the factors that, have militated against the realization of this goal namely, a lack of a proper definition, methodology, and content.

From this study, it has been noted that, if the operating assumptions of African Philosophy are not examined, it becomes difficult for it to respond to the challenges which it encounters.

Without a working definition, and methodology, a subject loses its vision and therefore stagnates. It is, therefore, important that, a subject's methodology be examined from time to time to ensure that it remains consistent and flexible. This

implies the quality of being able to adjust and adopt new ideas or to changes taking place.

African Philosophy should therefore give new direction to human thought. What is decisive is a new way of seeing, and the will to transform the whole intellectual scene. One should see in African Philosophy, a continuous development and not stagnation.

In this era of immense complexity, there is need for the philosophical activity of raising basic questions about matters that vitally affect Philosophy, and humanity in general. There is need for re-testing the standards both in the past and the present, to be able to forge out into the future.

African Philosophy ought therefore philosophize with the contemporary situation in mind, by tackling issues affecting humanity and finding solutions that are pertinent to the African situation. In this way, it will be able to speak relevantly to her own situation.

It ought to also work towards changing inadequate social, economic and political structures in order to improve the life standard of the African people. It should be forward looking and a continual process of finding workable solutions to the African problems.

The scientific, comparative and critical methods are necessary requirements for African Philosophy. By adopting these methods, African Philosophy will be able to open up new avenues from which fresh insights can flow in and old ones out. While the past is important, African Philosophy has no need dwelling there for too long. Life is dynamic and so are problems of human

existence, therefore it becomes necessary that philosophers construct new systems of ideas to help human beings meet their living needs.

African Philosophy is knowledge and an end in itself. This intrinsic value lies in its interest to comprehend human experience and ideas about the universe. This desire to understand is common and native to all human beings, and the question whether there is African Philosophy or not becomes liquified.

In conclusion, African Philosophy is developing objectively as works written by different scholars of Philosophy on a variety of topics indicate. The availability of these works elaborates ones knowledge on African Philosophy, and in turn generate criticisms. This keeps the fire burning as more and new ideas evolve, hence contemporary African Philosophy is in the making.

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