

**COURSE
GUIDE**

**PHL 251
AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY**

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CONTENTS	PAGE
Introduction.....	v
Course objectives.....	vi
Working through this course.....	vi
Study units.....	vi
Presentation schedule.....	vii
Assessment.....	vii
How to get the most out of this course.....	viii
Facilitation.....	viii
References and further reading.....	viii

INTRODUCTION

This course undertakes critical and analytic look at the African traditional thought, its historical origin, background, key concepts, religion, basic beliefs and general worldviews. It introduces the student to a descriptive and analytic examination of the main characteristics of African traditional thought. African philosophy has to do with what the African person is, what he believes in, and what his general values, norms, taboos, and entire life represents from cradle to grave. Therefore, African philosophy is the study of that philosophy which though being peculiarly native to the African, shares the basic features that can be attributed to philosophy universally (Sogolo, 1963 xi).

The study of African philosophy was necessitated by the desire of Africans to tell their own story and take their place in the world stage in issues of worldviews and civilization. If philosophy is described as “love of wisdom”, then it simply means that anyone who loves and pursues wisdom anywhere in the world could be said to be engaged in philosophy. This means that as Mbiti (1982, p1) noted, the study of the actions and words of the people provide us a mirror into what their philosophy is, and African philosophy embodies the entire religion, proverbs, ethics, oral traditions, morals and way of life of the African people (ibid,p2).

There have been serious debates as per the authenticity and what qualification of the African worldview that could be labeled “philosophy”. Many African philosophers like OderaOruka, KwasiWiredu, PlacideTempels, Godwin Sogolo, T. Uzodinma Nwala, to mention a few, have all had their say concerning the ability of the African to philosophize. But as Sogolo (1963, xii) describes it, the denial of the existence of any form of philosophy in and by Africans is more or less rational. Rationality is the defining quality of man, so when it is said to be lacking in a people, those people have been subtly reduced to a level lower than human.

However, it is no doubt that the study of African philosophy has further enriched the intellectual space of the world, and has given Africans a pride of place in world civilization. But despite every research that has been conducted on the subject matter of African philosophy, there still remain issues that constitute the ongoing discourse in the discipline. Those issues and others will form the main topics of discussion in this course.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In order to achieve the primary aim of this course, the following objectives have been set:

- To understand the meaning, nature and characteristics of African Philosophy;
- To examine the African ontological notions of force, being and spirits;
- To make a philosophical analysis of African cosmological notions, the concepts of life, death, mystical power, destiny, nature; and
- To examine the notions of rites and institutional structures embodying African traditional thoughts and relating African traditional thought to the African environment.

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

For maximum efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in this course, students are required to have a copy of the course guide, main course material, download the videos and podcast, and the necessary materials for this course. These will serve as study guide and preparation before lectures. Additionally, students are required to be actively involved in forum discussion and facilitation. You are also going to write a final examination at the end of the course.

STUDY UNITS

This course has 16 study units which are structured into 4 modules. Each module comprises of 4 study units as follows:

Module 1 Understanding African Philosophy

- Unit 1 Defining African Philosophy
- Unit 2 Meaning, Nature and Structure of African Traditional Thought
- Unit 3 Approaches in African Philosophy
- Unit 4 Historical Background of African Traditional Thought

Module 2 Some basic concepts in African Philosophy

- Unit 1 African Ontological Notions
- Unit 2 The Concept of African Socialism
- Unit 3 Witchcraft, Magic and Sorcery in African Philosophy
- Unit 4 Rituals and Festivals in African Philosophy

Module 3 Some African worldviews and Ethics

Unit 1	The Universe and Nature in African Worldview
Unit 2	Destiny and Fate in African Philosophy
Unit 3	Moral Thinking in African Philosophy
Unit 4	The African Traditional Religion

Module 4 Some Schools of Thought in African Philosophy

Unit 1	Contemporary Schools of Thought in African Philosophy
Unit 2	The Theory of African Humanism
Unit 3	African Political Theories
Unit 4	African Traditional Thought and Western Thought

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

This course has two presentations; one at the middle of the semester and the other towards the end of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, each student undertaking this course will be assigned a topic by the course facilitator, which will be made available in due time, for individual presentations during forum discussions. Each presenter has 15 minutes (10 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for Question and Answer). On the other hand, students will be divided by the course facilitator into different groups. Each group is expected to come up with a topic to work on and to submit same topic to the facilitator via the recommended medium. Both attract 5% of your total marks.

Note: Students are required to submit both papers via the recommended medium for further examination and grading. Both attract 5% of your total marks.

ASSESSMENT

There are two segments on assessment for this course. These are: Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs) and a written examination. You are expected to submit your assignments to your tutor as at when due for 30% of your total course mark. Afterward, a final three-hour examination accounts for 70% of your total course work. Together, all of these amount to 100%.

To avoid plagiarism, students should use the followings links to test run their presentation papers before submission to their tutors:

- <http://plagiarism.org>
- <http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html>

Similarity index for submitted works by student must **NOT EXCEED 35%**.

If the student is unable to check, the course facilitator will do this after retrieving the electronic format from their student. Similarity index for submitted works by student must **NOT EXCEED 35%**. Finally, all students taking this course **MUST** take the final exam which attracts 70% of the total marks.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS COURSE

For students to get the most out of this course, she/he must:

- Have 75% of attendance through active participations in both forum discussions and facilitation;
- Read each topic in the course materials before it is being treated in the class;
- Submit every assignment as at when due; as failure to do so will attract a penalty;
- Discuss and share ideas among his/her peers; this will help in understanding the course more;
- Download videos, podcasts and summary of group discussions for personal consumption;
- Attempt each self-assessment exercises in the main course material;
- Take the final exam; and
- Approach the course facilitator when having any challenge with the course.

FACILITATION

This course operates a learner-centered online facilitation. To support the student's learning process, the course facilitator will, one, introduce each topic under discussion; two, open floor for discussion. Each student is expected to read the course materials, as well as other related literatures, and raise critical issues which she/he shall bring forth in the forum discussion for further dissection; three, summarise forum discussion; four, upload materials, videos and podcasts to the forum; five, disseminate information via email and SMS if need be.

REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS/WEB SOURCES

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Odimegwu, Ike. (2006). *Philosophy and Africa* (Ed). Nigeria: Lumos Nig. Ltd.

Sogolo, G. (1993). *Foundations of African Philosophy*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

The following links can be used to access materials online:

www.pdfdrive.net

www.bookboon.com

www.sparknotes.com

<http://ebookey.org>

<https://scholar.google.com/>

<https://books.google.com/>

**MAIN
COURSE**

CONTENTS		PAGE
Module 1	Understanding African Philosophy.....	1
Unit 1	Defining African Philosophy.....	1
Unit 2	Meaning, Nature and Structure of African Traditional Thought.....	9
Unit 3	Approaches in African Philosophy.....	18
Unit 4	Historical Background of African Traditional Thought.....	26
Module 2	Some Basic Concepts in African Philosophy.....	36
Unit 1	African Ontological Notions.....	36
Unit 2	The Concept of African Socialism.....	46
Unit 3	Witchcraft, Magic and Sorcery in African Philosophy	53
Unit 4	Rituals and Festivals in African Tradition.....	62
Module 3	Some African Worldviews and Beliefs.....	70
Unit 1	The Universe and Nature in African Worldview.....	70
Unit 2	Destiny and Fate in African Philosophy.....	79
Unit 3	Moral Thinking in African Philosophy.....	89
Unit 4	The African Traditional Religion.....	99
Module 4	Some Schools of Thought in African Philosophy.....	108
Unit 1	Contemporary Schools of Thought in African Philosophy.....	108
Unit 2	The Theory of African Humanism.....	119
Unit 3	African Political Theories.....	129
Unit 4	African Traditional Thought System.....	139

MODULE 1 UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Unit 1	Defining African Philosophy
Unit 2	Meaning, Nature and Structure of African Traditional Thought
Unit 3	Approaches in African Philosophy
Unit 4	Historical Background of African Traditional Thought

Unit 1 Defining African Philosophy

Unit Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 What is Philosophy?
 - 1.3.1 The Nature of the African Philosophy
 - 1.3.2 Geography of African Philosophy
 - 1.3.3 The Debate on African Philosophy
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

1.1 Introduction

This unit attempts a conceptual clarification of the key term of this module, namely; African philosophy. Firstly, it attempts an etymological definition of philosophy and drawing from that, tries to analyse African philosophy by attempting to discuss some of its definitions. It then tries to define the geography of African philosophy while discussing some of the issues in the famous debate on African philosophy, amongst others.

1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- describe African philosophy
- explain the geography of African philosophy
- discuss the debate on African philosophy.

1.3 What is African Philosophy?

Philosophers generally agree that there is no universally accepted definition of philosophy, because the idea of philosophy has to do with the general worldview of a people which is somewhat difficult to pin down. But for us to begin to understand the concept of African

philosophy, we have to try to get an idea of what philosophy implies. Etymologically, philosophy literally means *love of wisdom*. This is derived from two Greek words; ‘Philo’, meaning love and ‘Sophia’, meaning wisdom. This means that taking it from the etymological meaning, philosophy can be said to be present wherever and whenever people curiously search for wisdom. This simply means that philosophy is not wisdom itself but the act of loving wisdom. Sogolo (1993: 11). Philosophy’s main concern is the human problem and predicament. But the perception and treatment of this problem and predicament is age and geography sensitive. The geographic sensitivity of the enterprise of philosophy makes it possible for it to be practiced by different people and in different locations of the world and still remain philosophy.

Philosophy generally emanates from the people’s traditions and way of life. Philosophy is generally described as the “mother of all disciplines”, that is why all disciplines have the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree as their last and highest degree (Akande and Okorie, 2012: 3). Philosophy has also been defined as the pondering on the wonder of the world and how man could better be prepared to make the right choices and be able to dissolve these worries and anxieties of life (Akande and Okorie 2012: 5). Philosophers of ancient times both in Egypt and Greece are said to have started philosophizing as a result of their wonder and curiosity. So in its fundamental stage, philosophy began when man began to question the realities of his environment in order to study them for better understanding. This is why one’s way of philosophizing is largely dependent on one’s cultural realities. There is no limit to what we can classify as philosophical knowledge (Akande and Okorie 2012: 1), but in recent times, some disciplines have begun to branch out of ‘mother philosophy’.

Philosophy as an academic discipline is a critical inquiry which seeks to investigate the assumptions of knowledge. It acts as a policeman of all other disciplines, to ascertain the validity of their claims and its application to reality. It frees man from the bondage of superstition, prejudices and cultural tyranny (Akande and Okorie 2012: 6). Therefore, when the subject matter of philosophy comes to the citadels of academic learning, it becomes a critical and rational inquiry.

1.3.1 The Nature of African Philosophy

Drawing from how we have defined philosophy above, we can safely understand what African philosophy is. As we have different definitions of philosophy, so do we have different definitions of African philosophy, depending on the school of thought one decides to align with. Many African philosophers like Wiredu, Bodunrin, Mbiti,

Hountondji, Nwala, Oladipo, and so on, have described African philosophy from their different perspectives and schools of thought. J.S Mbiti (1982: 2) describes African philosophy as the “understanding, attitude of mind, logic, perception behind the manner in which the African people think, act or speak in different situations of life”. Going by the above definition, it could be taken that African philosophy is the entire way of reason and life of the African. Mbiti (1982) goes further to note that these attitudes and traditions have been handed down by the forefathers of the African, but modified specifically to suit the age and time it is being practiced. These include myths, rituals, ceremonies, morals, and general worldviews of the African. Azenabor (2004) has also noted that African philosophy must be situated within a socio-cultural paradigm. This means that the African environment influences the thinking and reason of the African.

Kwasi Wiredu (2004) distinguishes three levels of African philosophy. The first is the level in which African philosophers study the traditional background of a people. This is also called folk philosophy. That is, philosophy at the level of traditional folktales and myths. He refers to this philosophy as “bold assertions without supportive arguments” (Wiredu 2004: 47). To Wiredu, this philosophy is the collective, rather than the individualized one.

The second has to do with the thought of a class of individuals in traditional African societies. Ezenabor (2004: 13) cites Wiredu as having described this class as those who have not been influenced by modern intellectual enterprise, but can still be capable of critical reflections which are different from folk ideas of the people. Here, Wiredu contends that the thought of individual indigenous African people deserve critical attention from contemporary African philosophers.

Wiredu describes the third level as the level of contemporary African philosophy. They will be done by contemporary African philosophers (Wiredu, 1980: 37). He describes this as the philosophy of the contemporary Africans, using the instruments of the modern world to tackle philosophy (Wiredu 1980: 37). According to him, this level of philosophy is still developing, and should be the yardstick with which African philosophy should be measured.

But it is our contention that every philosophy emanates from non-philosophy. It is from the traditional and environmental features of his time that Socrates started to philosophise during his time. No philosophy is entirely divorced from cultural and traditional hangover. No philosophy fell from the sky. Therefore, African philosophy is curiosity and wonder which is influenced by the African environment and its

peculiarities. The quest to understand and systematically study the African reality by the Africans themselves and from the perspective of the African experience is what is known as African philosophy. African philosophy in its academic sense has acted as a launch pad for Africa in global affairs. This is because the study of African philosophy in universities around the world has given the African continent a pride of place among the comity of nations of the world. It has gone a long way in correcting the prejudices harboured against Africa and the ability of her peoples to embark on any form of critical reasoning by the rest of the world.

1.3.2 Geography of African Philosophy

By geography, we mean the areas that should come to mind when referring to African philosophy. This means that when we talk about African philosophy, there are peoples and locations that should come to mind. In studying African philosophy, this question has been answered by many scholars in different ways. We shall attempt to articulate some of these views here, while analyzing them to make a somewhat definite argument. Where is the “Africa” that we talk about when we talk about African philosophy? Who are these Africans? How is ‘Africa’ conceived in African philosophy? Africa, as we know it, today, is the creation of the Europeans and we might have difficulty trying to use a European language to define what Africa is (Nwala, 2010: 158).

The geography of African philosophy has been limited by those who seek to detract African philosophy. The Eurocentric researchers and academics had tried to exclude Egypt from the geography of African philosophy, because according to them, Egypt is not part of Africa. However, Nwala (2010: 39) has cited ancient Greeks like Herodotus and Aristotle arguing that ancient Egyptians were “black skinned, “wooly haired, and “bandy legged”. Nwala (2010) went further to argue that if Descartes, a French, and Hume, a Scottish, can claim ancient Greeks as their intellectual ancestors, Africans of different geographies can as well claim ancient Egyptians as their intellectual fathers.

So, the geography of African philosophy is the entire continent of Africa, which includes the present day North Africa. As we have noted, the presentday Egypt was once occupied by black people, who thrived under the most sophisticated civilization known to the ancient world, and not just the current geography of black and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Makumba (2007) has observed that this attempt to remove Egypt from the geography of African philosophy was made by those who seek to deny the contributions of Africa to world civilization.

1.3.3 The Debate on African Philosophy

The debate on African philosophy centres on two issues:

- The definition of philosophy in the light of any writing coming from African philosophy to be considered as “philosophy”; and
- The definition of what is “Africa” owing to the fact that it is not all pieces of literature qualified as “African philosophy” that are truly African philosophy in character (Nwala 2010: 2)

This debate raged for a long time, and continues to rage among African philosophers and Eurocentric philosophers who are bent on denying the existence or validity of African philosophy.

Philosophy, as we earlier noted, is defined in terms of its etymology as “the love of wisdom”, and not even wisdom itself. This therefore means that the exercise of love towards the pursuit and acquisition of wisdom anywhere in the world can be described as philosophy. Sogolo (1993: xv) has identified that the ability for self-reflection and rational thought is a prominent universal trait of human beings. This simply means that, man, no matter the location, culture and colour of his skin, is capable of self-reflection and rational thinking. The human mind is structured alike and men reason alike in all cultures (Sogolo 1993). The cultural differences among cultures cannot be seen as deficiency, hence, the cultural difference between Africa and other parts of the world which makes Africans to apply reason in a different form cannot be said not to qualify as philosophy. Sogolo (1993) goes ahead to assert that the possibility of the human being to flip-flop on issues of consistency is a universal one. No race is totally free from inconsistency in matters of reason.

According to Nwala (2010: 3), those who seek to detract and malign African philosophy are guilty of *ignoratio elenchi*, that is, arguing out of ignorance and beside the point. This is because they seek to set aside African philosophy without first setting aside the traditions of the African peoples. They refuse to acknowledge that traditional African philosophy is an authentic philosophy, while at the same time accepting traditional European philosophy as an authentic one. What is the implication of this?

If Socrates, who never wrote anything, could be considered a philosopher even though he lived in the hay days of Greek superstition and traditional thought, why can we not accept African traditional thought as an authentic philosophy? As we have said, African traditional thought is an authentic philosophy because all philosophy began from the traditions and worldviews of the people. No

philosophy developed in isolation. Examining Oruka's Sage Philosophy, Azenabor (2009: 69) describes philosophic sagacity as an evaluation of thought by an individual African elder who is a repository of wisdom by the means of interviews, discussions and dialogues.

Anyanwu (1989: 271) has noted that the issue of methodology in African philosophy is not so important. Rather, he suggests that experience should be the yardstick to judge the authenticity of any philosophy which claims to be African. Therefore, African philosophy must not necessarily follow the patterns of Western philosophy to be considered authentic, but should follow African pattern, and improve based on the parameters of the African worldview. What Oruka called Philosophical Sagacity is what Momoh in Nigeria, called "ancient African philosophy" (Azenabor 2004: 102).

The debate on African philosophy is continuing as a psychological warfare. The Eurocentric researchers who do not want to see Africa take its place among the committee of ancient civilizations have continued to try to sabotage African philosophy by seeking for ways to find it wanting, but African philosophy has come to stay and will keep improving in ways consistent with the African worldviews.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. According to _____ those who seek to detract and malign African philosophy are guilty of *ignoratio elenchi* (a) Nwala (b) Russell (c) Hegel (d) Quine
2. The following statement: "The geography of African philosophy has been limited by those who seek to detract African philosophy" is (a) Necessarily true (b) Necessarily False (c) Partially true (d) Undetermined

1.4 Summary

We have tried to define philosophy and African philosophy. We have also seen that it is difficult to give one particular definition to philosophy, and the definition of African philosophy is also a controversial one. For instance, Azenabor (2014: 3) has cited Momoh that a philosopher is a child of his culture. This means that culture plays a vital role in defining philosophy. Again, we were able to situate the geography of African philosophy by insisting that ancient Egyptians were Africans, hence, their philosophy qualifies as African philosophy. The debate on African philosophy is the controversy surrounding it, to the extent that certain Eurocentric intellectuals question the authenticity of the discipline of African philosophy. This,

we have observed, is the result of cultural hegemony and acculturation which came with colonialism and slavery. The sum total of the worldview of the African is African philosophy. It is unique to African, so it must not be tailored towards the pattern of Western philosophy. African philosophy is the sum total of the way of life of the African, including his religion, arts, mores, sayings, and so on. Despite the attacks against it, African Philosophy has come to stay, and will continue to improve within the context of the evolving African worldview. It remains a launch pad for Africa in global affairs. Just as every philosophy began with traditional beliefs, so did African philosophy and it is unfair for anybody to measure African philosophy with yardstick of Western philosophy because cultures and civilizations differ in their approaches to reality. No philosophy is ironclad; therefore, if there are some limitations noticeable in African philosophy, such limitations are also observable in other philosophies like Western and Eastern philosophies.

1.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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Wiredu, K. (1980). *Philosophy and African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | (a) |
| 2. | (d) |

Unit 2 Meaning, Nature and Structure of African Traditional Thought

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 Meaning of African Traditional Thought
 - 2.3.1 The Place of Culture in African Traditional Thought
 - 2.3.2 The Nature of African Traditional Thought
 - 2.3.3 The gods and goddesses
 - 2.3.4 Rituals and Sacrifices
 - 2.3.5 The Value of Myths
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

2.1 Introduction

This unit attempts an analysis of the key concepts that could further provide in-depth meaning into the concept of African traditional thought. The meaning, nature and structure of African traditional thought x-rays the key issues such as the gods and goddesses, rituals and sacrifices, and the value of myth in Africa; giving the student a broader perspective of the issue of the subject matter of African philosophy.

2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning of African traditional thought
- explain the nature of African philosophy
- discuss the place of the gods and goddesses in African philosophy
- highlight the value of myths in African philosophy.

2.3 Meaning of African Traditional Thought

To refer to it as “traditional” thought is simply an attempt to distinguish it from the Western thought which has so far suffocated the African continent. The term “traditional” implies that this pattern of thought has unique features which are native to Africa. In a thought system, the individual must endeavour to key into the thinking of the society. Shadrikov, et al. (2016: 565) have argued that thought is a child of culture. This means that every civilization has its own thought pattern which is peculiar to it and which other societies may

not be used to. They went further to insist that people from other cultural affiliations may see and look at other cultures that they are not familiar with as nonsensical and meaningless, but every thought system is useful, especially to those who conceptualize and practice it (Shadrikov et al 2016).

Idang (2015) has expressed that these are the distinguishing factors that map Africans out and differentiate them from other people of the world. This thought system encompasses all that we do in Africa. As we have noted earlier, African traditional thought is the entirety of the system and pattern of thought of the African. It includes medicine, myths, religion, values, morals, and the whole belief system native to Africa. That system of thought and belief indigenous to Africans is what is known as African traditional thought.

The African concept of reality and time, the human person, the environment, and so, make up the whole body of African traditional thought. As culture distinguishes a people, so do thought systems and patterns. Some of the values of African traditional thought include: social values, religious values, political values moral values, aesthetic values, economic values, and so on. All these are products of thought. Thought is systemic because it is the system of thought that helps to attach meaning to whatever we think about. A thought system is an established system of rules and ways of thinking, to the effect that individual thinking within the said society, usually align with the already established system of thought.

As Shadrikov et al (2016) have observed, there is no best or perfect thought system anywhere. Therefore, we should appreciate the African traditional thought and give it its deserved relevance. More so, Horton (1967) has argued that the African traditional thought is not inferior to the Western scientific culture, but the only difference is that of approach and pattern. We will examine culture for a moment since we have noted that thought is formed through it.

2.3.1 The Place of Culture in African Traditional Thought

In order to further buttress the relationship between thought and culture, we shall look at the concept of culture briefly here. Taylor (1958) describes culture as a complex whole of morals, knowledge, beliefs, customs, arts, law or any other capabilities and habits required of man as member of society. Culture is a patterned way of life shared by a particular group of people that claim a common origin or decent (Idang, 2015, p 98). Looking critically, we will observe that culture and thought have striking similarities in that they are particular to a certain group of people. A pattern of culture and thought is always limited to a

particular set of people who have several things in common. It is when an individual is born in a society that he/she begins to assimilate the cultures of that society, which in turn inculcates a certain thought pattern in him.

So culture is very vital in the process of thought formation because without culture, we will not be able to form any kind of thought at all. Culture is a major influence on the formation of thought and thought system. Bello (1991, p189) sees culture as the totality of the efforts of a particular society to meet up with the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order to their political, economic, religious and aesthetic norms, thereby differentiating a particular people from their neighbours. This again, shows the influence of environmental factors on culture and thought formation. It is the attempt by any society to exist and create order out of apparent disorder that gives rise to a particular culture and thought pattern. Therefore, it is practically impossible for there be totally identical cultures since our environments differ. Culture is simply a way a people have adopted to respond to their environment and carve a living for survival.

2.3.2 Nature of African Traditional Thought

We have already dwelt on thought and thought patterns in the previous section. Here, we are going to take a look at the nature of African traditional thought. Traditional thought is the same as traditional philosophy, because thought gave rise to philosophy. This simply means some characteristics of this thought system is native to Africans. What are the basic features of this thought pattern?

Oyeshile (2008: 61) has noted that thought should constitute the entirety of the beliefs, folklores, religion and other concepts. The nature of African traditional thought is simply the way and manner Africans perceive and view reality. The human person, time, community, economics, democracy, governance; are all perceived by Africans differently from their European counterparts. Some of these features include: Africans are emotional, we are spiritually oriented, and we respect the ancestors.

The African is spiritually oriented because he believes that the spirit world controls everything; there are no fundamental differences between the spiritual and material because they are simply parts of the whole reality. We are subject to the repercussions of our deeds, a reason why the average African is afraid of offending against spiritual principles. The ancestors are revered in African thought system, because they encompass the religion and spiritism of the African. They are dead tribesmen who lived and died at ripe ages, and are believed to be

watching over the clan, and providing guidance from the spirit world (Prinder, 1962: 57). Libations and sacrifices are made to appease and seek the favour of the ancestors and the gods. Also, it is to commune and acquire some spiritual ability which the traditional African craves so much. The African is also communal in nature. Things are done in common and the idea of individualism which the West is familiar with is alien to African traditional thought system. The traditional African does not think about himself alone, divorced from the society. The community apportions roles to its members accordingly.

To enlighten the student more on this topic, we shall discuss the African idea of time and the human person briefly. So, in essence what is it about time and personality among Africans?

Babalola & Alokun (2013) argue that even before the dawn of Western education in Africa, traditional Africans had an idea of time. The traditional African society considers time as a socio-cultural phenomenon which must be lived and experienced. Mbiti (1969: 17) noted that the African traditional thought sees time in three dimensions; about events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately waiting to occur. According to him, whatever that has no likelihood of taking place falls in the category of "no time". This means that the traditional African thought sees time based on events. The African conception of time has to do with the planting time, harvest time, rainy season, and so on. So, when it is not time to do any of the things that should be done, the foreigner in our midst might think that we are lazy (Mbiti, 1969: 19).

The event-oriented concept of time in the African traditional thought system is a direct opposite of the mechanical concept of time they have in the West. It should be noted that this Mbiti's account of African time has been criticized on the ground that it is doubtful whether it is a correct representation of how time is conceived in Africa. It is said, for example, that the claim that African have no sense of the distant future cannot be correct about a people who value and cherish heirs and successors, who are valued as those to carry on with the family lineage. This is nothing but concern for the distant future. Anthony (2015) has also argued that the African conception of time which Mbiti (1969) narrated might actually be the reason why Africa continues to suffer underdevelopment and backwardness. According to him, that idea of time means that the vision of Africa about the future is very limited since there is no clear conception of the distant future in the African idea of time, and a people without vision will likely not witness any form of development (Mbiti 1969: 130-131). Some scholars have also accused Mbiti of hasty generalization, using the Kikimba culture alone.

The African idea of the human person is another aspect of the thought system we shall examine. Ezedike (2019) states that the conception of man in African traditional thought system is simply to determine his worth as a human person, and his relationship with others in the society. Man is not individualistic, but a part of the whole (Ezedike 2019). The African therefore sees a human person as that person who commits himself to the community, and performs the functions that the community gives him. That is where the idea of kinsmen comes in, one is nothing without the community of his kinsmen. He cannot go against the community, because the community is bigger than everybody. Therefore, when an African says that somebody is not a “human being”, it is not the literal human being, but that such a person has not performed the functions of a human person according to the African traditional thought system.

2.3.3 The gods and goddesses in African Philosophy

The nature of gods and goddesses in African philosophy is very important; this is because the African way of life is more or less a religious and spirit-oriented one. So, the gods and goddesses occupy prominent space. And these gods and goddesses form a hierarchy (Mbiti 1969: 76). They are conceived as God’s earthly messengers in the creative and executive functions (Mbiti 1969). The natural phenomena like weather, sunshine, mountains, seas, lakes, rivers and boundaries are all associated with one divinity or the other (Mbiti 1969: 77). No one wants to offend the gods or goddesses, as they are revered as the agents of reward and punishment. The African pours libation and appeases the gods and goddesses for gratitude and for the purification of the land whenever one does something against the gods.

These gods and goddesses have their priests and priestesses who attend to them and serve as the intermediaries between them and the people. The traditional religion of the African cannot be complete without due reference and regards to the gods and goddesses who are believed to play some roles in keeping and securing the community against evils and atrocities. There is no aspect of life in African tradition that has no god or goddess overseeing it (Edike 2019). This means that the sum total of the life of the African is spiritual, and these gods set moral codes in the society which every member of that society must abide by. Mbiti (1969) has argued that the ancestors are messengers of the gods; the gods use them to deliver crucial messages directly to the clans and families where the priests and priestesses are not used. The African believes that he is not worthy to approach God directly, that is why he decided to do that through intermediaries who are lesser gods, in order to not incur the wrath of God. In the hierarchy of beings, God is at the top of it, followed by the lesser gods and goddesses, then the

ancestors, and the human being. In this pattern, the flow of information can either be vertical or horizontal. That is, the human being can approach the gods for a favour by appeasement, and the gods can pass instructions to the human being through the ancestors and the priests and priestesses.

2.3.4 Rituals and Sacrifices

Rituals and sacrifices are used to appreciate and appease the gods and divinities in African tradition. Accordingly, all religions center their power on sacrifices and rituals; African tradition is not an exception. Rituals and sacrifices are ways by which Africans express their happiness or sadness (Mbiti 1977: 61). They are ways of worship in African religion, and provide authenticity to the worship of the individual person. This is done through music, singing, moving from place to another, clapping, beating of drums, in order to express the feeling of joy, sorrow or thanksgiving (Mbiti 1977). When a member of the clan commits abomination, these rituals and sacrifices are needed to sanctify and cleanse the land; to avoid being punished by a malevolent spirit.

The diviners are charged with responsibility of informing the people of the particular ritual needed for a particular ceremony, whereas some forms of rituals and sacrifices are performed periodically and routinely. This is done to either invoke the anger of the spirits on someone or to attract blessings, cure sicknesses, or appeal for progress for one's self (Horton, 1967). The idea of sacrifice is also done to one's personal god in his home. Some traditional African peoples have their shrines in designated places in their homes, where they go every morning to pour libations and perform rituals and sacrifices to their gods and goddesses. For instance, it is believed that any sickness which defies the ordinary and conventional medicine, might be a punishment from the gods, hence, efforts are made through the diviners to find out the nature of sacrifice and rituals to perform by the relatives of the sick person (Horton 1967). In a situation where the afflicted person cannot afford the items of the ritual, his relatives and kinsmen rally round to help him out, in order to remove shame from their family. We shall treat the issue of rituals and sacrifices more broadly in Module 2, unit 4.

2.3.5 The Value of Myths

Myths are essential aspects of African traditional thought system. A myth is way of explaining some imaginary or actual reality which is properly understood, and cannot be explained through normal description (Mbiti 1977: 77). Myths are literal because they are not the same as facts. Myths form a part and parcel of African traditional

religion and philosophy. Myths are beliefs that cannot be sufficiently explained within the ambits of reason and evidence. Many things are simply unexplainable by the African; ranging from social, spiritual, environmental, and even family issues.

Myths are used to offer explanations for such occurrences. People at the level of traditional thought system are barred from questioning the authenticity of these myths. This is because the African seeks to preserve and keep whatever his ancestors left behind in order not to incur their wraths and indignation. Some myths have been in place for thousands of years, and people are born into that particular society to meet, learn and believe such myths. Ikenga-Metuh (1987: p31) posits that myths are sacred sayings which are said when rites, ceremonies, rituals, or moral rules demand justification, warrant of antiquity, reality and sanctity. So one can say in the other way round, that myths are used to appropriate authenticity on the actions, history, ceremonies, rules and social norms in Africa. And these myths are always attached to the ancestors and spirits, without which they will be denied acceptability. So, myths keep African philosophy going. These myths are used to explain reality; ranging from the origin of man, the essence of taboos, customs and traditions, and so on. Some of them are carved on woods, clay, ivory and stone, to show their ancient origins (Mbiti 1977: 77). Without the use of myths, many things in the African tradition cannot be explained. So, myths are veritable ways of passing information about certain practices and traditions to the next generation. Through myths, we are able to dig into the psychology of the human past, helping us to understand how our ancestors thought and how they were able to navigate our society.

Myths vary in importance and age. They can also be about institutions, God, creation, origin of man, values, death, heroes and leaders, kings, chiefs, animals, natural forces, objects, various habits of living and behavior of things around us (Mbiti 1977: 78). These myths exist to answer questions of “how” and “why” something exists, and also to respond to issues about man’s quest for eternal rest. Therefore, myths are very important in African tradition. But the question remains how Africans can manage to reform this body of myths and make them relevant in the contemporary world. Besides, since human understanding grows, there is the need for Africans to seek clearer and deeper understanding of these myths, so as to discard anachronistic ones.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. According to _____, the African conception of time has to do with the planting time, harvest time, rainy season, and so on.
2. The African therefore sees a _____ as that entity who commits himself to the community and performs the functions that the community gives him.

2.4 Summary

We have tried in this unit, to look at the nature and structure of African traditional thought. We did this by examining the way Africans think, examining thought itself, and knowing the significance of culture in the process of African traditional thinking. We were able to understand that culture influences thinking, and every new member of any society will assimilate the culture of the society gradually to aid the thinking process. We identified that thought systems and patterns vary significantly from society to society, because culture and thought systems are simply a peoples' way of responding to their peculiar environments. So, African traditional thought system is a thought unique to Africans as a result of location and environment. We have realized that the thought system of the Africans has religion as an integral part of it and these practices have ingredients that make them what they are. Such features include, sacrifices, myths, rituals, the gods and goddesses, and so on. We have noticed that without these features, it will not be possible to call any thought pattern African. African traditional thought is the sum total of the thought pattern of the African people. It is different in nature, form and character from the Western scientific way of thought. Religion and taboos are part and parcel of the thought system, and they have been handed down to our ancestors through oral traditions for us to preserve and also hand over to the generations coming after us. The thought system and pattern of the African does not need to completely mirror the Western way of thought to become valid; rather, it should try to evolve just like every other thought system, while maintaining its Africanness and/or Africanity.

2.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | | |
|----|--------------|
| 1. | John Mbiti |
| 2. | Human person |

Unit 3 Approaches in African Philosophy

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 Ethno-Philosophy
- 3.4 Philosophic Sagacity
- 3.5 Nationalistic-Ideological Philosophy
- 3.6 Professional Philosophy
- 3.7 Summary
- 3.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 3.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

3.1 Introduction

The issue of the approaches to African philosophy was made popular by the late Kenyan philosopher, H. Odera Oruka. He conceptualised these approaches as ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalistic-ideological philosophy and professional philosophy. He propounded these approaches to African philosophy in order to respond to the question of whether there is an African philosophy, or a philosophy that can be regarded as indigenously African. To Oruka, anyone doing African philosophy must do it using any of the above approaches. These he called the four trends of African philosophy, and they can also be referred to as methods of African philosophy. This unit gives us an in-depth analysis of these four methods of African philosophy; describing them one after the other and equipping the student adequately to understand their essence and scope.

3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of African philosophy
- discuss the approaches in African philosophy
- explain the essence of these approaches and their importance in African philosophy.

3.3 Ethno-Philosophy

What precisely is ethno-philosophy? Ethno-Philosophy is the approach made popular by Pauline Hountondji. It is a method adopted by those African philosophers who rely on the hybrid of ethnology and philosophy in their conception and definition of philosophy (Chemhuru 2013). Bodunrin (1984) maintains that ethno-philosophy is the activities

of those anthropologists and ethnographers who have examined and interpreted the collective worldview of Africans, their folk wisdom and myths as constitutive of African philosophy. In other words, this method of African philosophy is more or less ethno-cultural in nature. Ethno-philosophy is the conviction that the starting point of philosophy is the traditional religions, sayings, myths and customs of the African. Ethno-philosophy sees African philosophy as a communal thought (Bodunrin, 1981: 161; cf Kaphagawani, D. In Coetz, P & Roux, J 1998).

Ethno-philosophy is based on the idea that there is an ideology that can be seen in African tradition, and that ideology can be referred to as philosophy. As we can see from other traditions of philosophy namely, Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy, every philosopher is influenced by the culture prevalent in his time among his people and his society. That is where ethno-philosophy comes in, it is total of the communal way of thinking prevalent within a particular society, based on the philosopher can philosophise.

Ethno-philosophy can also be referred to as culture philosophy, and this means that it is different from philosophic sagacity which has to talk about individuals. The major proponents of ethno-philosophy are John Mbiti, Placide Tempels and Alexis Kagame. Ethno-philosophy is the African approach to the world and realities. We have earlier observed that culture is an integral part of a peoples' philosophy, ethno-philosophy is that cultural aspect of African philosophy. It could be described also as the cloud of unreflective magico-religious claims which contain evidence of philosophy that can be extracted and converted into a body of knowledge (Sogolo, 1993, xiv). Ethno-philosophy advocates that the raw material for philosophy in African should be the culture of the African. Aside these, what are the other core features of ethno-philosophy?

Ethno-philosophy believes in the uniformity of the diverse cultures of the African peoples and refutes the idea that the community cannot philosophise. It is attracted to the African past, by studying and analysing it critically to extract some form of philosophy from it. Ethno-philosophy believes in, the communal nature of the African way of life, and believes that the people can collectively practice philosophy. Ethno-philosophy has its origin in the belief that Africans reason differently from the West (Oruka, 1987, p10). The study of ethno-philosophy has helped a great deal in proving the Western denigration of African philosophy wrong, and giving out the proper education about the African culture and peoples to the wider world (Chmehuru, 2013).

Ethno-philosophy found expressions in the works of Senghor and Temples, Kagame, Mbiti, and Mudimbe (Makumba, 2007: 119). This underlines a form of a unified African philosophy; which is called Bantu Philosophy as espoused by Tempels. This philosophy identifies African peoples as a unified, collective organism (Nwala, 2010: 111). It leaves no room for individualism of any kind, and calls on all African to come together and have the unity and oneness to fight against the cultural degradation by the West. This kind of philosophy deals on the communal worldviews of the people and draws data from the materials of ethnology available to the people. Nwala (2010) noted that the school of ethno-philosophy is a variant of the traditional philosophy.

3.4 Philosophic Sagacity

A sage is a wise individual who lives in a community. In the African setting, sages are not hard to come by. The sage has a good knowledge of the culture, customs and beliefs of the people and can reproduce them in proverbs and wise sayings (Makumba 2007: 101). This method was made popular by Odera Oruka in his *Philosophical Sagacity*, where he is said to have interviewed the sages in Kenya. The sage exudes knowledge, traditional knowledge which is also philosophic in nature. Those who propounded this method of African philosophy believe that when we begin to listen to the sayings and talks of the old wise people in our traditional African environment, we will definitely be able to extract some philosophy from them. The sages do not write anything, they only talk based on their experiences in the traditional setting. Socrates, renowned for his exploits in Western philosophy can be categorized as a sage in this context, because Socrates himself did not write anything, but mainly moved about seeking to correct the ills of his society.

There are two types of sagacity as Makumba (2007) has identified: the folk sagacity and the philosophic sagacity. The folk sages are generally dogmatic and do not wish to question the veracity of their cultures and traditions (ibid, p102). They are 'die-hard faithfuls of traditions' and do not want to be involved in anything that seeks to dethrone their traditional beliefs and customs. The folk sagacity is the first order level of philosophy which zealously and jealously seeks to justify and preserve a particular culture. It is the uncritical method that simply avoids the critical questions about the current way of life of the people. Makumba (2007) noted that this kind of sagacity could lead to a mental blockade because it does not welcome any form of external ideas, no matter how good such ideas might be. It does not encourage cultural encounter which help to improve cultures. The folk sage is only interested in what his people say, and not in anything the other peoples are saying. But we know that philosophy has the attribute

of comparison, and comparative philosophy is healthy because it helps different cultures and philosophies to learn from one another. With the recognition of sage philosophy as a form of philosophy, the argument against traditional philosophy grew weaker.

Another type of sage philosophy in the approaches in African philosophy is the philosophic sagacity. The philosophic sage can make critical and independent assessment of what the folk sage will naturally take for granted and hold on to, despite reasons to the contrary (Makumba 2007: 102). This the stage Oruka referred as second order level of philosophy. He does not repeat folk ideas, but has broken the walls of uncritical traditionalism, in order to question ideas and cultures systematically, using the tool of reason. Sage philosophy is aimed at repudiating the idea that Africans are not capable of reflective and rational thinking; an impression the Europeans have had for centuries (Oruka, 1997: 181). While the Europeans could claim that African sages did not write anything down, we also know that neither Thales nor Socrates wrote down any of their sayings. It was done by other people. So the African sage philosophy is an important way of hearing from the wise elders of Africa, just like the Greeks heard from Thales and Socrates.

Oruka insists that the sage philosophy should be treated as an important trend in the development of philosophical thought in Africa (Oruka, 1998, cited in Goetz, P & Roux, A: 100). This is because the thoughts of the sages are philosophical in counseling; especially in issues of nature and human life, as the thought of the sages provides answers to questions that bother on metaphysical and moral issues. Secondly, their thoughts form a significant raw data for professional philosophical reflections (Oruka 1998). It is an erroneous idea that sages are illiterate and technologically backward old people who live in communities far removed from civilization. A sage can also be a technologically literate person who understand the workings of his community and relate those ideas philosophically.

3.5 Nationalistic-Ideological Philosophy

This approach emanates from the ideas of leaders of national liberation movements. These leaders put their ideas down in one way or the other for the entire people. This usually leads to a political philosophy for such a people; a philosophy that could potentially give them independence. This kind of trend in African philosophy comes from highly regarded freedom fighters that also produce a philosophical ideology for their countries. Examples of these kind of persons in Africa may include Nkrumah, who advocated an ideology of decolonization based on *consciencism*, Nyerere, who propounded the *Ujaama*

(education for sustenance and liberation), and Senghor, who advocated the *Negritude* (Hapanyemgwi-Chemhuru, 2013). What then is the underlying feature of this strand of doing African philosophy?

This way of practicing African philosophy is mainly for liberation purposes and to fashion an ideology for the people as a launch pad. Nationalistic- Ideological philosophy preaches for the return to core African humanism, and the idea is that independence will not come unless there is some form of mental liberation. Essentially, Nationalistic philosophy seeks to de- westernize Africans, in order to achieve independence using the approach of the African value system. The idea behind this form of African philosophy is that the Western ideology has failed in Africa, so we should be coming home by adopting the native African models, especially in politicking and governance (ibid). Nkrumah (1978), in his *Consciencism*, argued that for us to begin to make any form of progress, we must incorporate the outside influence on Africa, which is represented by Christianity and Islam, with the point of departure which is the African traditional way of life. Nationalistic- Ideological philosophy is a way of departing from unhealthy imitation by the Africans, the desire to restore the African dignity socio-politically and otherwise. Nationalistic philosophers are characterized by their struggle against colonialism and oppression (Makumba, 2007). They do this by calling on all to return to the African values in order to unite in one voice and umbrella. They desire to find a solution that is uniquely African, tackling African challenges by African ideas and techniques. Nationalistic-Ideological philosophy helps to raise people's consciousness against oppression and political misrule. It is a political weapon in the hands of the native Africans, to help them fight against denigration and colonialism.

It was this nationalistic philosophy that African nationalists used and rallied the entire continent against the banditry of colonialism and oppression. The philosophy could also be very important today for Africa against neo-colonialism. Nationalistic philosophies are ideas of liberation and emancipation, Africa can adopt more of this philosophy today to help create for herself a place of honor in world affairs.

3.6 Professional Philosophy

Professional philosophy is practiced by professionally trained philosophers, who have imbibed the Western way of practicing philosophy (Owolabi 1999). The first generation of academic philosophers in Africa began the trend of professional philosophy; the likes of Peter Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, Oder Oruka, Pauline Hountondji, and so on. This is the stage of academic philosophy. The professional philosophers are those who have studied philosophy in the

universities, adopting Western methods to practice it. Professional philosophers, study and analyze the other three trends of African philosophy to ascribe meaning to them and make them more lucid for easy understanding. Owolabi (1999) argues that the professional philosophers “purified” the discipline of philosophy to make sure that just anything does not pass as philosophy in Africa. Professional philosophy establishes a standard for a thought system to pass as philosophy; it must be able to meet the Western universal standard of philosophy. To professional philosophers, philosophy should be practiced by those who have studied it and understood it very well.

The sages and ethno-philosophers are not professionals, neither are the nationalistic philosophers; so it is the duty of the professional philosophers to give philosophical meanings to whatever they say or do. Socrates was not a professional philosopher, but a Greek sage; but it was Plato who later ascribed meaning to what Socrates had to say. Sogolo (1993: 1) refers to it as “systematised philosophy”, which pioneers in Africa are intellectual products of alien culture, who have to philosophise also in alien languages. The professional philosophers argue that African philosophy must take a universal conception and align with the universal way of practicing and doing philosophy if it is to be accepted as philosophy indeed. They believe that African philosophy should not be practiced in isolation; it should move side by side with other philosophical traditions. To them, African philosophy could be any inherited body of thought (be it Western or Eastern) which has been assimilated and nurtured within the African cultural and traditional context (Sogolo 1999: 3). Such philosophy may not have to originate in Africa, but may grow in the African philosophical traditional. How do the professional philosophers argue out their point?

The professional philosophers argue that just like physics, chemistry, and medicine etc., are the same universally, philosophy should be philosophy everywhere. There should not be cultural demarcations in philosophy, but a philosopher should be able to practice anywhere in the world. Professional philosophers argue that philosophy is different from religion and mysticism because it has reason and logic as tools (Hapanyemgwi-Chemhuru 2013). Therefore, reason, logic and the sciences are not the exclusive preserve of the Europeans. Reason is a universal human trait, so African philosophy must be practiced with reason also. It must have a universal approach and compete favourably with other traditions of philosophy around the world. African philosophy, according this school, is beyond folk worldviews, but entails critical reflection on issues. Those who subscribe to this trend of African philosophy are referred to as the Universalists.

The professional philosophers are mostly men and women who have studied in the Western-influenced universities in Africa and around the world. They have taken philosophy as a profession and practice it according to the Western style, using the tools of logic and reason. The professional philosopher contends that African philosophy, if it must be practiced, must be able to meet the universal standards of doing philosophy which has been established by the Greco-Roman movement. But one criticism of professional philosophy is that it does not guard against extreme universality which is at the expense of the particularity of the African experience and philosophy. According to Sogolo (1993), a philosophy that is said to be African must be able to reflect the cultural experience of the African people.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. The _____ are mostly men and women who have studied in the Western-influenced universities in Africa and around the world.
2. _____ is also known as folk philosophy.

3.7 Summary

The essence of these approaches to African philosophy was to find an adequate response to those who malign African philosophy by dismissing its existence. They survey and analyze the various orientations in African philosophy; thereby establishing what it looks like when one is said to be practicing African philosophy. African philosophy is practiced if any of the above approaches is used at any time. In this unit we have discussed the four trends in African philosophy, which include the ethno-philosophy, which canvasses for the cultural origin of philosophy, philosophic sagacity, which is about the views of African wise men and women who, though having not studied philosophy as a profession, are endowed with the necessary knowledge and wisdom with which the professional philosopher can philosophize, nationalistic-ideological philosophy which is the philosophy for liberation by the African campaigners for independence and self-government, and lastly, professional philosophy, which has to do with the philosophy of those Western trained philosophers on the African continent.

3.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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3.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional philosophers; 2. Ethno-philosophy |
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Unit 4 Historical Background of African Philosophy

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 The Egyptian Origin of African Philosophy
- 4.4 Africanness of African Philosophy
- 4.5 Egyptian Influence on Greek Philosophy
- 4.6 African Philosophy and Colonial Experience
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

4.1 Introduction

This unit will form the final phase of our examination of the history, background, meaning and concepts in African philosophy. We shall discuss the historical origin of African philosophy; which literally talks about the beginning of African philosophy from the ancient Egyptian mystery schools, the expansion of the philosophy to other nearby locations like Ethiopia and Sudan, the Africanness of African philosophy, which simply implies the definition of whose philosophy should constitute African philosophy and what extent of Africanity is acceptable as adequate for African philosophy. We shall also examine the Egyptian origin of Greek philosophy, and to a large extent world civilization, for Egypt influenced some of the most celebrated Greek philosophers of the ancient times. Lastly, we shall analyze how the colonial experience of African intellectuals has led to the birth of what we now know as contemporary African philosophy.

4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the historical origin of African philosophy as it has to do with Egyptian mystery schools
- explain what is meant whenever the Africanness of African philosophy is mentioned
- analyse and defend the Egyptian origin of Greek philosophy
- explain the relationship between colonialism and contemporary African philosophy.

4.3 The Egyptian Origin of African Philosophy

The historical origin of African philosophy can be traced to the cradle of African and world civilizations. Since civilizations determine the trajectory of philosophy, the origin of African philosophy is the African civilization and the ancient worldviews of the African peoples. The history of African philosophy is synonymous with the Egyptian civilization, as Egypt's history is traceable to 10,000 BC, as early farming in Africa is said to have developed around the valleys of the Nile River (Fayemi, 2017). Ancient Egyptian civilization is said to have been a Negro civilization, and the history of African civilization will remain suspended in the air if ancient Egypt is not connected to it (Fayemi, 2017). Azenabor (2010: 19) stresses that the fact that ancient Egyptians were African is only being obscured by racism because there exists a link between ancient Egyptian culture and contemporary African culture. He goes further to argue that just as the study of Western philosophy includes the ancient Greek philosophy, the study of African philosophy cannot be said to have happened when the ancient Egyptian philosophy has not been included (Azenarbo 2010). Afrocentric philosophers have also observed that African traditions, myths, folklore, proverbs, superstitions, and religions are the evidence of ancient African philosophy (Azenabor 2010: 20).

William Dubois, an American born African philosopher and one of the great campaigners for ancient African civilization noted that:

...it was in the valley of the Nile that the most significant continuous human culture arose, significant, not necessarily because it was absolutely the oldest or the best, but because it led to that European civilization of which the world boasts today and regards in many ways, as the greatest and last word in human culture (Dubois 1972: 98).

This simply implies the fact that the ancient Egyptian philosophy was the background to African philosophy. Afrocentrism is the concept evolved by African American scholars like Dubois, to drive home the point that Africa has an ancient civilization which has also imparted the entire world one way or the other. It shows the primacy of the authenticity of African traditions and civilization (Nwala 2010: 77). If the ancient Egyptian civilization could be said to be the cradle of world civilization, then it is common sense that it is also the origin and cradle of African philosophy and civilization. It was this ancient Egyptian philosophy that spread to other parts of Africa and the world; thereby creating the philosophical traditions we have today, even those attributed to the Greeks. African philosophy is not a philosophical tradition that could be dismissed, because that will mean the dismissal of an important aspect of world and African history.

Citing Asante (1985), Nwala has mentioned that the ancient Egyptians made “stunning contributions in geometry, science, philosophy, architecture, writing and organized religion, the ideas of governance, medicine, education in the mysteries, geomancy, and the arts” (Nwala 2010: 79). The history and origin of African philosophy is the history of Africa in a special way, because it will help to show the various areas of connectivity among areas of interest in African philosophical space (Fayemi 2017). Nwala goes on to state that the argument against Egypt being part of Africa as made by some the detractors of African philosophy was unfounded. This is because, it was the Nubians who originated what was later known as Egyptian civilization, but dispersal caused by Alexander the Great and the Arabs interrupted this civilization (Nwala 2010: 79). These Badarians from Nubia were blacks who brought religion, monarchy and science to ancient Egypt. Herodotus and Aristotle also described ancient Egyptians as “black skinned and woolly haired.” Herodotus described them as the descendants of the Ethiopians (Nwala 2010: 39).

The history of African philosophy is also important because it has the possibility of charting a roadmap to what should constitute African philosophy in this contemporary period. As have been noted, one of the major problems of ancient African philosophy is the scanty nature of recorded materials that could be referenced, but many African philosophers and Afrocentrists have argued that the fact of non-availability of these written references does not rob African of her pride of place in the history of world civilization, and cannot dismiss the fact that ancient Egyptian civilization was a precursor to the contemporary African philosophy (Abanuka 2013). This means that philosophy is not only qualified by writing because it has to do with wonder and curiosity. The ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, did not write anything down. He existed as a sage whose writings were later made popular by his student, Plato, in his Dialogues. Against the argument of some western- influenced scholars, African philosophy is not new on world stage. It is as old as the civilization of the world.

4.4 Africanness of African Philosophy

This simply refers to who and who can their philosophy be considered as “African”? What kind of philosophy should be regarded as having come from Africa? Makumba (2007) considers it an identity issue. He describes it as a question of culture and conception. The conception one has about who qualifies to be an African will definitely determine what he/she considers African philosophy to mean (Makumba 2007: 34). To qualify as an African philosopher, one does not only need to be born an African, but must treat a theme unique to the African culture and tradition; which means that one might be philosopher born

of African descent but still fails to meet the benchmark of who an African philosopher is. The Africanness being discussed here does not mean that such a philosopher must live within the boundaries of Africa, but in as much such a person has sympathy and empathy to the plight of Africa, and goes ahead to create a philosophy which, being distinctly African, identifies and expounds the essence of African traditions and worldviews to world civilization (Makumba 2007: 34). Such philosophy should be able to contribute to the development of Africa.

Maurice Makumba outlines three characteristics that define what African philosophy. They include, that which was written and compiled by a person born of an African stock, a philosophy written, conceptualized and formulated in the African continent, the third is the philosophy which deals with African problem or culture (Makumba, 2007). He also notes that these criteria overlap. Some have also defined Africa here to include those who are Africans by law or association. Makumba insists that that is inflation. But he advises that a distinction should be made between those who are “expatriate Africans” and indigenous Africans. Some people are Africans by relevance and enterprise, but that should be differentiated from the indigenes of the continent. Again, there are those who come from Africa and are living in African. Yet, another group might come from Africa but based in the Diasporas.

From the above, we can see that the definition of who an African philosopher is, is a very fluid one. But in the midst of all these discussions, we should understand that African philosophy goes in search of identity in utter disregard to the western expectations, understanding and spirit of philosophy (Makumba 2017: 35). African philosophy cannot afford to be practiced in isolation as the world has become aglobal village.

4.5 Egyptian Influence on Greek Philosophy

Godwin Azenabor in his book *Modern Theories in African Philosophy* contends that some Greek, Western and Christian doctrines were not original to them, but are native to Africa (Azenabor 2010: 26). He cites Innocent Onyewuenyi, who holds the view that Greek philosophy, medicine, mathematics, geography, and the sciences were taken from the Egyptian mystery system (ibid). This view has it that the West tried to appropriate African philosophy and intellectual evidence as a result of racial prejudice. As we have noted earlier, the Nile Valley is the origin of world civilization. According to Nwala (2010: 14) Socrates was a graduate of the Egyptian Mystery System, the reason why he did not write anything on his own, in accordance with the rules of the system. The Egyptian Mystery Schools had a rule of secrecy which was aimed at avoiding adulteration (Azenabor 2010: 28).

Nwala (2010: 14) has also buttressed the fact that before the emergence of the Greek philosophy in the 6th century B.C, African philosophy had been established firmly as the cradle of great philosophical legacy to mankind. Nwala (2010: 15) has gone further to argue that:

- The world's first philosopher in history was Imhotep (2800 BC), and he was African;
- Imhotep, who lived 2000 years before Hippocrates was known as "The god of Medicine" by the Greeks;
- The oldest philosophical schools of thought originated in Africa, namely, at Heliopolis, Hermopolis, Thebes and Memphis; and
- Monotheism, the idea of one God, was first expounded by Pharaoh Akhenaten (1375-1358 BC). He was the teacher of Moses, who was also a black Egyptian.

The most influential among all the ancient Egyptian philosophies on Greek philosophy was the Memphite Theology. Nwala notes that it was the source of modern scientific knowledge (Nwala 2010). According to him, the Memphite Theology now lies in the British Museum in London. This Theology contains the theological, cosmological, and other philosophical views of the ancient Egyptians. The influence the Alexandrian science and philosophy had also helped to groom the civilization of the world from the third century BC up to AD 400 (Nwala 2010: 16). It formed the intellectual capital of the world between 300 BC and 400 AD.

The Alexandrian Academy hosted most of the progenitors of modern science and philosophy. Alexandria was the cradle of the development of Hellenic philosophic tradition as has been observed by Nwala (2010: 176). Makumba (2007) cites Africanus Horton (1886), as having observed that some eminent ancient Greek figures like Solon, Plato, Pythagoras, and others came to Egypt to listen to the instructions and wise sayings of Euclid, who was the head of the most celebrated mathematical school in the world as at then; a school that flourished 300 years before Christ (Makumba 2007: 26). The ancient Egyptian Mystery System was highly influential on the Greek, and by extension, western philosophy. The fact that some of the celebrated figures in Egyptian philosophy came to Egypt to study in the schools is a bold testament to that, Nwala (2010) insists.

Egyptology is the aspect of learning which seeks to connect the ancient Egyptian civilization to world civilization. This intellectual movement tries to establish the influence the ancient Egyptians had on Greek and western thought. But the technological advantage gained by western Europe in the 17th and 18 centuries has led them to encourage their cultural writers to malign and derogate Africa (Nwala 2010, p38).

If Egypt has been said to be the cradle of civilization, and since philosophy is one of the main aspects of civilization, it then means that Egypt is the origin of philosophy. Having said that, the major difference between the two systems of philosophy (Egypt and Greek) is the ability to write down something. However, this idea of the Egyptian origin of Greek philosophy has been criticized by claiming that Egyptians never named what they were doing “philosophy”, that it was the Greeks who first used that word to describe the enterprise of philosophy (Azenabor 2010: 33). It might also be argued that while the Egyptians were busy contributing to the area of knowledge and civilization, the Greeks could be given the credit for rational inquiry which involves thinking, questioning, analysing, and trying to purify the original thought initiated by the Egyptians. Also, history has shown us that cultural overlap is a part of human civilization. The Egyptian and Greek traditions definitely met at one point or the other in the history of the ancient world, to borrow and learn from each other. It is quite natural for a particular culture to understudy and borrow from other cultures. But one important thing is that such cultural overlap should be recorded in history for it to be easier to make reference to and avoid intellectual controversies.

In the contemporary times, the issue of who borrowed philosophy from who has become increasingly controversial. What now confronts us in our contemporary world, and especially in African Philosophy, is the best way to practice philosophy so that it can solve real life problems in Africa and around the world. Another major concern of African philosophy in the contemporary time is the relevance it is acquiring for itself. African philosophy cannot afford to be isolated from the world or global community, whether it influenced the Greek philosophy or not. We have passed the stage of determining who and who influenced the other, because the world needs to wake up from this seeming cultural warfare and work together to move learning and philosophy forward.

4.6 African Philosophy and the Colonial Experience

By African philosophy and the colonial experience, we mean the influence of colonialism on African philosophy. Africa has been the most oppressed and exploited continent in human history, and that experience of colonial exploitation, coupled with that of slavery, has helped to shape African thought and philosophy in a certain unique way. We mean to explore what roles colonialism played in shaping contemporary African thought. The philosophy which has emerged from this experience is known as contemporary African philosophy. This contemporary African thought gives further enlightenment to African worldview; it is a philosophy of self-recognition. This was a search for African identity which was envisaged in the development of African thought, an identity project of self-affirmation (Makumba, 2007: 113).

The influence of colonial exploitation was an assertive cultural nationalism which had to survive in the face of cultural and ideological devaluation of the black race by the colonial masters. This colonial suppression led some African intellectuals to develop a specific thought pattern aimed at shaking off the shackles of colonialism and oppression (Makumba 2007).

Makumba recalls that it was mainly the efforts of African French intellectuals who labored to set aside the myth of super-race and of presumed super- intellect of the white man (Makumba 2007: 115). The feeling of superiority and cultural hegemony which the whites arrogated to themselves, gave them this mindset that Africans, and black people in general, do not deserve to be treated as equals to the white man. The philosophy of a superior European culture was challenged by African thinkers, exploring the contributions of Africa to the civilization of the world. This struggle for liberation gave rise to many liberation philosophies in Africa, including Ujamaa, Negritude, Consciencism, Neo-welfarism, and so on. The derogatory nature in which some Western philosophers painted Africa contributed to the racism and exploitation to which Africa was subjected for many years. Some respected western thinkers, like Hegel, wrote that Africans have no rationality. This, some African thinkers like Nkrumah, Senghor, Nyerere, Azikiwe, and so others responded to by their respective philosophies; those philosophies now regarded as liberation philosophies.

Therefore, according to Makumba (2007: 115), it is impossible to envisage a contemporary African philosophy which was developed independently of the colonial experience. The encounter between western and African philosophy has influenced African philosophy to assume a certain dimension and direction. The colonial experience and contemporary African philosophy are closely related and connected. We can only talk about the non-existence of this relationship in African countries that never experienced colonialism, and perhaps, there are a minute number of those countries. The nature of contemporary African thought would not have been the way it is now if not for the encounter with West in form of colonialism. An example of this, as we have noted before, is Negritude. Negritude is a theory of black racial self- consciousness as well as the ethno-philosophical endowment of the black race. The major quality of negritude is the issue of suffering which Africa has come to know throughout her encounter with the West (Washington, 1973: 27). It is a counter-argument to the western idea of portraying the Negro as uncultured and uncivilized.

The contemporary African philosophy which emerged from the shackles of colonialism and oppression does not seek to claim cultural superiority, but to allow Africa a suitable place among respectable peoples of the world. As a response to cultural and ideological hegemony, it seeks parity with other cultures of the world, insisting that Africa has what it takes to organize herself and rule herself, accordingly. It is a philosophy of liberation; liberation from colonialism, racism and exploitation against the black race. Contemporary African thought is a reminder to our western counterparts that no culture is ironclad; every culture has something to benefit and gain from other surrounding cultures around. When there is an intercourse between two or more cultures, there must be something to gain that will have the tendency to strengthen each and every of the cultures. As Fanon (1980: 169) rightly noted, there is nothing to be ashamed of in the African past. Rather, there are dignity, glory and solemnity, to be savoured.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ is the aspect of learning which seeks to connect the ancient Egyptian civilization to world civilization.
2. _____ was a graduate of the Egyptian Mystery System, the reason why he did not write anything on his own, in accordance with the rules of the system (a) Theophilus (b) Socrates (c) Sisyphus (d) Zeus

4.7 Summary

African philosophy is rich and endowed, but the interruption of slavery and colonialism affected it so much, and even interrupted this great civilization in so many respects. If we admit that civilization began in Egypt, it is also logical to say that philosophy began in Egypt (Africa). So, if there is anywhere philosophy exists today, we might attribute its roots to the ancient Egyptian school system, where everything is said to have started. Egypt is part and parcel of Africa as against the negative campaigns that have been carried out by some western philosophers, who set out to malign and derogate Africa and her peoples. This ancient philosophy, though affected by many alien influences, has continued to blossom and flourish in the minds of Africans. In this unit, we have concluded the examination of the history and nature of African Philosophy. We have examined the origin of African Philosophy; tracing it back to its beginning in the Egyptian Mystery Schools. Also, we have looked at the African origin of Greek and Western philosophy; attempted to establish the fact that what we now know as Greek philosophy originated from the mystery schools in Egypt. We have closely analyzed the influence of colonialism on

African Philosophy; which we now know as contemporary African thought. The student should endeavour to read more by consulting other materials and books that could help him/her to navigate this course properly.

4.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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Dubois, W. (1972). *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Parts which Africa has Played in World History*. New York: International Publishers.

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Fayemi, A. (2017). "African Philosophy in Search of Historiography". *NOKO Institute of African Studies*. Carleton, Ottawa Canada.

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Washington, S. (1973). *The Concept of Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor*. New Jersey: Princeton Press.

4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | | |
|----|-------------|
| 1. | Egyptology; |
| 2. | (c) |

End of Module Questions

1. The colonial experience and contemporary African philosophy are closely related and connected. (a) True (b) False (c) Undetermiend (d) None of these
2. Pick the odd choice (a) Mudimbe (b) Awolowo (c) Senghor (d) Nkrumah
3. The _____ Academy hosted most of the progenitors of modern science and philosophy.
4. Maurice Makumba outlines _____characteristics that define what African philosophy (a) Four (b) Six (c) Three (d) Two

MODULE 2 SOME BASIC CONCEPTS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Unit 1	African Ontological Notions
Unit 2	The Concept of African Socialism
Unit 3	Witchcraft, Magic and Sorcery in African Philosophy
Unit 4	Rituals and Festivals in African Philosophy

Unit 1 African Ontological Notions

Unit Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 African Ontological Notion of Force
- 1.4 African Ontological Notion of Spirits
- 1.5 African Ontological Notion of the Human Person
- 1.6 African Ontological Notion of God
- 1.7 Summary
- 1.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 1.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

1.1 Introduction

This unit introduces you to the African ontological notions of force, spirit, being and God. It analyses how the traditional African society views and understands these concepts. These notions underlie the basic beliefs and practices in African philosophy, and Africans draw their faith in these things from myths, traditions and customs which are influenced by our physical environment. One of the philosophers whose work we are going to study extensively in this unit and the entire module is Placide Tempels, who gave popularity to the African ontological notions through his work on *Bantu Philosophy*. The views Africans attach to these notions are quite different to what the West view them to be. To the African; force, which he calls vital force, is a very important component of reality and being. It is a reality which might be invisible, but is supreme in man. The vital force according to Tempels, refers to the quality of life. Azenabor (2010: 39) cites Tempels that force is tied to the notion of being, the reason why they are identical in their definitions of being. Mbiti (1982: 78) has described spirits in African philosophy as the most common populace of spiritual beings. Azenabor (2010: 68) quotes Idoniboye as having noted that “the ontology of any distinctively African worldview is replete with spirits.” He goes further to note that in African worldview, spirits are real “like tables and chairs, peoples and places” (Azenarbo 2010).

1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain what is meant by African ontological notions
- differentiate between the African notion of force and the Western notion of force
- state the characteristics of the African notions of spirits and being
- evaluate and critique Tempel's theory of vital force.

1.3 African Ontological Notion of Force

Ontology in philosophy is the study of being, and in African philosophy, this being is force. The Africans' understanding of ontology is a hierarchical ordering of being and force (Agbo, 2018). Placid Tempels calls it *vital force* and argues that it is the theory that can explain everything about the thinking of an African (Azenabor 2010: 39). Azenabor continues by saying that Tempels made a comparison of both the Bantu and Western philosophies; and while maintaining that the West holds a static idea of being, he credits dynamism to the Bantu (African) idea of force (Azenabor 2010). As Kaphagawani (1998, p170) notes, that Tempels believed that Africans conceive entities or beings as nothing more than essential energies or vital forces. The African believes that without the element of force being cannot be conceived as force is inseparable from being (Kaphagawani 1998: 171). Azenabor (2010: 40) notes the following characteristics of Tempel's vital force as follows:

- Vital forces are dynamic and there is no permanent hold anywhere;
- Vital forces are hierarchical order, from God who is the supreme vital force to the ancestors, to the living generation, to animals, plants, minerals, and other non-living things. There is therefore ontological relationship in the universe, as there are no isolated forces. That is why lineage is said to make a major aspect of African worldview;
- A weaker force is at the services of the stronger, as the stronger one influences it directly. That is why Africans are not permitted to see things in isolation; nature is believed to be ordered since all forces are inter-dependent and related;
- Vital forces can be active and communicable, they can also be diminished or increased; depending on the influence of a superior being or evil forces; and
- Vital forces can be good or evil, hostile or friendly, benevolent or malevolent, since unknown and unforeseen intervene in the course of events.

These attributes of vital force can only be known by experience and intuition, according to Tempels (Azenarbo 2010). Kaphagawani (1998: 171) has cited that though Tempels portray force as an essential property of being, it means that force can be a necessary attribute of being but nevertheless, not a sufficient condition, which means that being could possess some attributes and properties rather than that of force. Tempels *Bantu Philosophy* set the pace for the study of African philosophy and religions because it properly interpreted the African mind which is known to be able to tap the forces of nature (Azenabor 2010: 41).

Ngangah (2019) has also described vital force as the peculiar trait of African philosophy and cosmology. He narrates that the environment from which the African derive sustenance is an integral aspect of force. Vital force holds the interpretation for the fused nature of the concepts of personhood and community in African worldview. Since the community may be described as the superior and stringer force in African traditional settings (Ngangah 2019). Force is life, vital energy and is the object of prayers and invocation to God and the ancestors (Ngangah: 48). What then are the philosophical implications of this idea?

However, Kaphagawani (1998: 172) has criticized Tempels by stating that though Tempels made efforts to steer away from the Western conception of being, he surreptitiously employed the very distinctions used to differentiate humans from other entities in Western philosophy. This he did by claiming that humans are differentiated from other beings in Bantu by their properties of reason and volition. The same properties used in Western philosophy to distinguish between humans and animals. Some African scholars like Pauline Hountondji, have also criticized Tempels on the basis that he was not a professional philosopher but a Christian missionary; that his philosophy does not qualify as African philosophy but scholastic and ecclesiastic in nature. Secondly, they argue that Tempels is not an African and as such could not have been able to present an African philosophy (Azenabor, 2010: 43).

1.4 African Ontological Notion of Spirits

Mbiti (1982: 78) describes spirits in African philosophy as the beings beneath the status of divinities and above the status of man. He went further to state that the spirits have no definite origin as some of them are said to have created themselves (Mbiti 1982: 79). Africans believe that spirits are what remain of human beings after their physical deaths, which means that it could be said that spirits are the ultimate status of man. Mbiti (1982) contends that it is a point of change or development that man cannot go, except some few national heroes who might become deified. Ukwamedua and Edigiawen (2017: 318) observe that these spirits dwell in rivers, hills, farms, forests, trees, and even lightening.

In Igbo ontology, most of the spirits are particular, but some, especially *Ala* (the earth spirits) are universal throughout the land (Ukwamedua and Edigiawen 2017). Africans address most of these spirits in their prayers and libation, and every human endeavour is said to be governed by the spiritual powers that reward or punish people; depending on one's behavior and attitude in that sphere of life. The spirits are above the status of man and below the Supreme Being (Ukwamedua and Edigiawen 2017). The African does not hope to become a spirit, for just as a child will one day become an adult, so will man one day become a spirit (Mbiti 1982: 79).

Spirits "are seen in the corporate belief of their existence" (Mbiti 1982) and being physically invisible, no one knows where they are and where they are not. Yet their activities are experienced by people and many folk stories are told about spirits described in form, activities and personalities, even if it is with some element of exaggeration. Citing Robin Horton, Azenabor (2010: 68) notes that "Spirits are normally invisible and intangible, though they can be seen at will by diviners who have undergone the proper rites, they also materialize sometimes."

It is by the joining of the spirit to a material body that all things are created; and it is by the separation of the spirit from the body that they are destroyed...spirit is real. It is real as matter. Its reality is primordial, and it is, if not superior, at least, as primitive as that of matter. In its pure state, it is unembodied. Spirit is the animating, sustaining, creative life-force of the universe. In human bodies, it becomes the mind of soul... (Azenabor 2010: 69).

The spirit world differs from the human world as it is invisible to the physical eyes of men. People only know and believe that it is there, and they are ontologically nearer to God in terms of communication (Mbiti, 1982). Mbiti also notes that the spirits are saddled with responsibility of conveying human sacrifices or prayers to God as intermediaries (Mbiti 1982: 80- 81). Africans hold their living-dead in high regard because becoming a spirit is a form of social elevation. As we have earlier noted, spirits can be either malevolent or malicious, depending on the situation they are responding to. In African ontology, it is also believed that spirits can possess a person either negatively or positively; a negative spirit possession is caused by any act that attracts the anger of the spirit, while a positive spirit possession happens when a certain spirit wants to use an individual as instrument or a mouthpiece to correct some anomalies in the community. Spirits may possess people in form of mental disorder or one ailment or the other. Sacrifices and libations in the shrines of such spirits are used to appease them in order to liberate such a person from negative spiritual possession (Mbiti 1982).

1.5 African Ontological Notion of the Human Person

While there are biological, anthropological, religious and psychological methods of defining personhood and man, the African conception of the human person is quite different from these because it is more of a cultural and communal conception of man (Musana 2018). In African philosophy, the notion of the human person is irrevocably tied to that of the community. This means that the African people have a communalistic understanding of the human person and the self. The African conception of man is not in the sense of his universal characteristics which all men possess, but the certain way in which a given community conceive personhood (Sogolo 1993: 190). This simply implies that in Africa, a person is regarded and viewed not by the physiological and biological characteristics of personhood, but by what he/she is cable of achieving and the impacts he makes on the larger community. As we have noted earlier in module one, personhood or man has far more serious implications in Africa than in the West. The conception of man that is used here is suggestive of potentiality and actuality at the same time. This means that it involves both what man is at a point in time and what he is capable of becoming in an ideal human society (Sogolo 1993: 191).

One can lose his personhood even while he remains alive by isolating himself from the community of his kinsmen and brethren (Musana 2018). Personhood is achieved by socialization; by the process of creating an identity for one's self. Musana goes ahead to opine that when one becomes so immoral and unjust, such a one is described as "heartless" and an "animal" because it is not the biological heart that essential describes an African person, but the ability to treat others the way he/she would want to be treated. Personhood is the ability to act within the values and ethics of the community; values which are established for the sake of equity and fairness in the society. Mbiti (1982: 80) argues that only in terms of other individuals does the individual man become conscious of his existence. There is a communal feeling both in suffering, rejoicing, and the individual performs his responsibilities and duties to the society and community. Issues of marriage, burial, child birth are treated among the entire kinsmen and community and nobody has anything alone on his own, apart from the community (Mbiti 1982). This idea of personhood in African traditional society has also made sure that there is high value of human life among Africans in the traditional society, whatever is done is usually for the maintenance of lives. No one has the power over life and death.

The community decides what a person becomes and the individual man exists only to the extent of the community. Personhood in African traditional sense grows as long as one's communal responsibility grows;

it is constituted by the community and expressed in relationships that one has with the community. Africans also believe that the human person has two main elements; the physical and the spiritual. This idea of personhood is quite different from the Western idea of a person which is individualistic and mechanical. The African is more concerned with the well-being of his society than his own selfish well-being, because it is all about the community and not about the individual person (Mbiti 1982). So, in African traditional thought system, a man cannot have everything economically while his kinsmen suffer in penury. A man's wealth is measured by the comfort of those around him. However, some criticisms have been directed towards this African idea of personhood in the sense that it does not create an environment for personal freedom, since the fate of the individual person is tied to the fate of the community as a whole (Musana 2018).

Menkiti (2004) asserts that age has a role to play in the moral maturity and personhood in Africa, and even in other parts of the world. It is this moral attribute which is geared towards enriching the community that counts for the qualification of personhood in Africa. This is the reason why the adults hope for the maturity of the children in order for them to join the community of persons. Menkiti (2004: 326) argues that the movement of the individual child to full personhood is a journey which is determined by age, and ends in ancestorship. To him, personhood is not an automatic achievement by anyone in Africa, but a process which begins at birth to various stages like puberty, marriage, and childbearing, taking of titles, old age, adulthood, elderhood, and ancestorship. Ancestors are still part of the living community as the personhood gained through this process will end when the person becomes a 'nameless dead' (Menkiti 2004: 327). At the stage of a nameless dead, the person who began from it returns back to it. That is why Menkiti posits that the personhood in African philosophy is a journey from it to it. This is an interesting theory which should merit more research from the student.

Gyekye (2002) has argued that since a community implies an association of individuals with common interest, goals and aspirations, it then follows that the community exists to establish the priority of the individual rather than the other way round. The human person, he maintains, is not self-sufficient, he needs other people to flourish, which is the essence of a community. But a community consists of persons sharing interests and values; therefore, the community is there to serve the individual interest. The interest of the individual is prioritised against the interest of the community, as long as the community is made up of individuals whose interests it is meant to serve. The community existentially derives from the individual who is there primarily to protect his own personal interests, since the community is not a mere association

of individuals without purpose (ibid). This idea is also worth the student's consideration as it opposes the idea that the individual interests are subsumed under the interest of the community in African traditional setting. A tree cannot make a forest, but there can be no forest without individual trees. So, there can be no community without the individual person.

1.6 African Ontological Notion of God

“Expressed ontologically, God is the origin and sustenance of all things” (Mbiti 1982: 29). He is said to be both out and involved in His creation. The African has a notion of God as the Supreme Being who is above all things and capable of doing all things (Mbiti 1982). Mbiti (1982) goes ahead to assert that the African God is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, myths, stories, prayers, names and religious ceremonies. Spiritual power in African ontology is viewed hierarchically, where God is at the helm of it, followed by the spirits and natural phenomena, and yet beneath is man (Mbiti 1982). God is a provident creator who is directing each individual and the universe to a definite end (Ikenga- Metuh 1987). God in Africa is conceived as a Supreme Being who is invisible and therefore, a spirit (ibid, p106). He is endowed with human qualities except those that are repugnant to His nature. The African, despite having different smaller gods, still pays tribute the Supreme Being as the source of all life and sustenance. Mbiti (1982) notes that these lesser gods are fulfilling the duty of running errands for the Supreme Being and serving as links between the Supreme Being and man.

Islam and Islam (2015) define God in the traditional African sense as the origin of everything in the universe, as God is viewed in both immanent and transcendental dimensions. The view of oneness of God makes no place for atheism in traditional African society, everyone believes that there is a maker of everything who, though being far removed from the activities of the physical world, has an influence on everything and directs the whole universe the way He wants it to go. Knowing about God in the African context is instinctive to the adherents of the African religion (ibid). The Africans believe that human beings are limited in several aspects, but God is limitless, supreme, Almighty, omnipotent, sustainer and other great qualities. Islam and Islam go further to list the following qualities of God in the African religion:

- God is self-perfect, self-supporting, self-sufficient and self-sustaining and self-containing. God has no father, no mother; He is of Himself and brought Himself into being;
- God is all powerful and His omnipotence also manifests in His created nature. He is also supremely wise, absolute and beyond

all knowledge. He knows all and sees all; the discerner of hearts who knows both the inside and the outside of man;

- God has immanent features for the need of His people, He contemporaneous to the traditional peoples of Africa. He exists through all objects and can manifest through natural phenomena. He is beyond human imagination, so people cannot even appreciate Him fully in their imaginations; and
- God is that never ending creative force of nature that inspires people to go for innovative ideas and actions, the intellect is not capable of examining Him as He is the fathomless spirit and one could say, the unknowable. He is very much associated with eternity and has given different moral attributes to His followers. Some African tribes describe Him as the mighty immovable rock that never dies.

The Igbo believes that God creates each individual person from birth; He gives each person his spirit and assigns him his destiny package before he is formed in his mother's womb (Ikenga-Metuh 1987). God precedes all both in order of time and excellence as His transcendence is expressed in His inscrutability' well known but impossible to completely comprehend (Ikenga-Metuh 1987: 111). This means that God is at the centre of whatever the African does, He is above all things and sustains all things through His ever-present creative force. The idea of God permeates the entire belief system of the African because he believes that nothing happens for nothing. The traditional African does not attach mechanical implications to events and happenstance; he believes that God has ordered the universe in such a way that nothing happens without being according to His plan and purpose. Therefore, in the African ontology, accidents do not exist in nature, and everything that happens has a reason.

Idowu (1962) has also argued that *Olodumare* in Yoruba is the Great God. This Great God is all encompassing; including lesser divinities, worship, priesthood, morality, and human destiny. He maintains that *Olodumare* is beyond the idea of primitive worship of stones and wood, as some Westerners allege. *Olodumare* is the Supreme God in Yoruba religion, and it is Absoluteness. Idowu asserts that Yoruba religion is not polytheism as there is but only one Supreme God who is worshipped through the lesser gods.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. According to _____, the _____ has a notion of God as the Supreme Being who is above all things and capable of doing all things
2. “The community decides what a person becomes and the individual man exists only to the extent of the community.” This proposition is (a) Necessarily True (b) Necessarily False (c) Partially False (d) Undetermined

1.7 Summary

In the last module, we state that long before Africa came in contact with the West, we have always had our own independent knowledge of the universe and nature. This knowledge has helped us to navigate our environment and allowed us to create societies that are distinctly African. But with the advent of slavery and colonialism, some of these values have been affected by Western thought and religion. In this unit, we have been able to examine some major African ontological notions. These notions form the basis of African thought system on the various topics. The African ontological notion of being, speaks of force which is dynamic and hierarchical; the African can die and transcend to the spirit world where he becomes higher than the physical man, as the African does not pray and hope for it, it is just a matter of time. The African notion of the human person sees man from a different perspective than how the West views man. To the African, personhood is achieved not just by anthropological and biological features, but by the level at which one associates and socializes with the community. But as we have noted earlier, one criticism of this idea is that it has ignored the individualistic nature of man. The African believes that God is the all-powerful and almighty creator of the universe, despite having other lesser gods who are regarded as inferior mediators between the supreme and man. God controls all things and has pre-knowledge of everything. The belief that man's destiny is apportioned and dictated by God is also prevalent in the African religion.

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1.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | | |
|----|----------------|
| 1. | Mbiti/African; |
| 2. | (a) |

Unit 2 The Concept of African Socialism

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 History and Background of African Socialism
 - 2.3.1 Values of African Socialism
 - 2.3.2 Pitfalls and Criticisms of African Socialism
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

2.1 Introduction

This unit examines the concept of African socialism. Makumba (2007:134-135) has described African socialism as the brain-child of Africa's ideologies or philosopher-kings in the young African republics after wresting power from the colonialists. African socialism teaches that the central values of Africa are communal rather than individual; it is seen as a natural evolution of African communalism (Makumba 2007). African socialism teaches the commonality of living and existence. It takes the welfare of the community above the parochial interest of any single individual, no matter how highly placed. This means that the community is bigger than any individual, and everybody is expected to obey the rules and regulations put in place by the community. The early post independent leaders of Africa sought for ways of countering the idea of individualism and capitalist tendencies in Western thought, that was the reason most of them started championing the idea of African communalism, which later evolved into what we know as African socialism. It was meant to be a situation where the people will take advantage of ancient African values of common living in order to create people-oriented societies out of the newly independent states.

2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of African socialism
- discuss the background and history of African socialism
- analyse the values of African socialism
- identify the limitations of African socialism.

2.3 History and Background of African Socialism

Leopold Sedar Senghor in his *Negritude* expounded the concept of African socialism. Abanuka (2013: 87) notes that Senghor pictured the African society as collectivistic or more exactly, communal “because it is formed from a communion of minds rather than from aggregation of individuals.” The history of African socialism goes back to the ancient African value of being one’s brother’s keeper. We have noted earlier that personhood in African worldview goes beyond the anthropological and biological dimensions; it is more of the relationship one has with others within the same community or society. Mboya (1963) argues that African socialism has its origin in the post independent socio-political transition when African countries emerged from colonial rule. At the end of colonial rule in most parts of Africa, the new independent nations set out in search of identities at personal, national and international levels; struggling to build new societies and new political philosophies in order to build a new Africa (Mboya 1963). The likes of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Modibo Keita of Mali, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, and so on, conceptualized the idea of African socialism as a political tool for repositioning African countries at independence. This idea of African socialism must be about African make-up and not the socialism of the Western type. It is not the Marxist socialism of the West which is steeped in foreign thought mechanics, but based on the ideals of the African brotherhood (Mboya 1963: 8).

Akyeampong (2017) states that the colonial experience was oppressive to the extent that very little physical infrastructure existed in the African colonies at the end of colonialism as there was a huge dearth of illiteracy, poverty and underdevelopment. The little infrastructure was there for the extraction and export of natural resources and not for the concerted growth of national economies. This was the challenge African leaders faced at independence; a challenge which they set out to tackle by the adoption of a home-grown model that will extend development to all and sundry. This model was the African brand of socialism, a system that incorporates everybody and makes sure that developmental projects are spread evenly; preventing the gap between the rich and the poor from widening the more. The idea of brotherhood and common heritage, as well as that of colonial exploitation and oppression, led early African leaders to adopt the concept of African socialism.

The African belief that we are all sons and daughters of the soil goes a very long way to influence our social, economic and political relationships. From this belief, we adopt the principle of equality because we are all sons and daughters of the soil, and also by this belief we have the communal ownership of the vital means of life-land (Mboya 1963: 8). And every able-bodied male and female worked, there was no

room for laziness as there were social sanctions and ethics to encourage industriousness and hard work.

Mboya (1963) notes that though poverty existed, but not as a result of exploitation. This is to say that the African concept of socialism frowned at exploitation and laziness. The operation of kinship helped to spread the wealth of the wealthy and ensured that nobody lives in affluence while his kinsmen suffer in penury and poverty. This idea is an indigenous one and springs from the experiences and environment of the African people. The ideas of African socialism was adopted in order to formulate philosophical blueprints for the reconstruction of the young African countries post- independence (Makumba, 2007: 134). Their philosophy was practical and result oriented, because the situation they found themselves demanded such pragmatism. The whole idea of African socialism in the post-colonial era was inspired by the urgent need for an African response to colonialism and neocolonialism (Makumba 2007).

2.3.1 Values of African Socialism

African socialism was used as an ideology central to nation building (Mboya 1963). Akyeampong (2017) notes that all the early African leaders who adopted this concept viewed the independence of their countries as connected to the broader movement to liberate the whole of the continent from colonial rule. That is the essence of the spirit of brotherhood which was evident among the first-generation post- colonial African leaders. The African socialism helped the African leaders to emphasize a revival of the cultural values of the African, albeit with a contemporary touch. This is to say that African cultural values of the past which was set aside by colonialism and oppression, was reawakened by the use of African socialism. Babu (1981) argues that the African socialism helped the leaders to pursue economic self- reliance and non-alignment. This economic self-reliance helped the newly independent states to focus on what they can do for themselves by making use of the natural resources and human capital available to them. It helped in some ways to avoid reliance on foreign loans to run the newly independent nations.

This concept of African socialism was a veritable instrument in the reconditioning of the African mind immediately after independence, and also helped in the fight against neocolonialism as Sekou Toure (1972: 117) put it:

All imperialism is always accompanied by a cultural aggression, an acculturation enterprise, an action of cultural alienation for the purpose of a complete conditioning necessary for a political and economic subjugation. And this is why, for peoples emerging from colonial

enslavement, the task of cultural dis-alienation for the return to national culture is imperative for the consolidation of national independence and concrete sovereignty, meaning a full exercise of the popular will in all fields.

What does the foregoing from Toure mean? This return to national culture was attempted by the use of African socialism, and though we will concede that it never succeeded totally, but the influence it had on the new nations was significant. It largely helped in the provision of basic needs and welfare of the people. As an ideology, African socialism is an important aspect of political culture which helped to lend meaning to political acts and elevate social conflicts and tensions to more sophisticated plane of political dialogue, thereby contributing to the process of consensus formation (James 1974). Going further James asserts that historically, Africa has been indigenously socialistic and the elements of this socialism lend a unique identity to the continent. Cooperation and social obligation for work are all part of a network of traditional socialist roots (James 1974). Again, the rejection of the European culture during the struggle for independence has led most African states to re-investigate their histories for institutions, traditions and elements of doctrine which they consider unique to the African way of life, and appropriate for the modern culture.

2.3.2 Pitfalls and Criticisms of African Socialism

By limitations and pitfalls, we mean the areas where African socialism failed to actualize its objectives and the areas where some scholars have also pointed out as its pitfalls. Despite the waves it made during the 50s and 60s in the new nations of Africa, this ideology has many obstacles and challenges that militated against its proper actualization in Africa. Yacouba and Wolonggueme (2018) have identified some limitations of African socialism which include the following:

- The problem of reconciliation among African countries as to the meaning of African socialism was difficult. This was the reason why there were differences in socio-economic patterns of the different African countries. This made the task of synchronization more difficult as different countries pursued different realities and different interests even within the African bloc. Since colonialism had created two major classes; that of the privileged and the oppressed, national and regional reconciliation was very difficult;
- The misunderstanding of the concept among some African leaders and citizens was the reason why the likes of Nkrumah and Keita were dethroned through military coup. Ghanaians became tired of Nkrumah's rhetoric that there was jubilation when the

military removed him from power. The citizens, for whom the African socialism was meant, could not understand it as a result of the ignorance of the majority. They did not understand that the fight for them and their emancipation, that was exactly the contrast; and

- There was a lack of military strategy because when the colonial masters began to fashion ways through each country's military, to destroy the African vision about complete independence, it was difficult for those countries to provide genuine protection against such onslaught, so countries began to resort to the old imperialist strategy to survive. The militaries were not supportive of the African socialist agenda, due to colonialist influences.

When we say that African values are communal rather than individual, we also need to subject "communal" to further analysis as communal makes no sense without a definite community of peoples. The problem now lies in identifying the particular community that is the object of African socialism's communal values (Makumba 2007). One has to consider whether it is a closed community that recoils into itself or an open society that goes all out for interrelationship.

Makumba (2007: 153) also questions if African socialism will stand the test of Popper's criticism going by its totalitarian adoption of democracy in post-colonial Africa. He notes that African socialism has the tendency to become tribal individualism; a situation where one individual pursues his selfish interest with a whole tribe or clan behind him. The tribe perhaps, has been tricked to believe that the interest of the individual is also the interest of the tribe. What is the social implication of this outlook?

This potentially sets the stage for racism and tribalism, a setback for the benefit of identity in African socialism. In this way, tribal consciousness will replace national consciousness, and the dream of African unity will continue to be a mirage. Fanon also criticized national consciousness by identifying that if care is not taken, the nation will be replaced by the race and the tribe:

National consciousness instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been. The faults that we find on it are quite sufficient explanation of the facility with which, when dealing with young independent nations, the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state (Fanon 1980: 119).

That is the pitfall of this sort of national consciousness as represented by the African socialism; people begin to rally round tribal elements that seek not the welfare of the nation, thereby throwing away the basic tenets of the concept of African socialism. Makumba (2007: 154) refers to it as the abandonment of global consciousness for tribal and village consciousness. And the continental dream for a united Africa gradually fizzled away. But despite these pitfalls, African socialism was useful as a launch pad for political, social and economic reengineering of new African nations of the 1960s. But the fact that African socialism was not a complete success led most African countries back to the concept of capitalism which the West used to exploit Africans for centuries. Whereas African socialism adopts communitarian principles where everybody is taken care of no matter his status, Western capitalism is more interested in the exploits of the individual and his ability to use his fellows; exploiting them for his own personal interests. The West and her capitalist system is more interested in individuals who have outsmarted their fellows, acquiring so much wealth in the process. While the West preaches individual freedom, African socialism is more about the community and its welfare.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ also criticized national consciousness by identifying that if care is not taken, the nation will be replaced by the _____ and the _____
2. _____ in his *Negritude* expounded the concept of African socialism.

2.4 Summary

The concept of African socialism is rooted in the traditional, political and economic system of Africa from time immemorial. But the advent of European colonialism and exploitation set this novel African idea back by centuries. However, when the struggle for independence of different African nations were gathering steam, African post-colonial leaders adopted this age-long African economic principle in order to provide an alternative to the Western exploitative economic regime. Though the concept had its own pitfalls, but credit must be given to it for seeking to galvanize Africans and against colonialism. In this unit we have examined the concept of African socialism, and we learnt that African communalism gave birth to what is known as African socialism because the socialist idea is based on the communalistic and communitarian African worldviews. We also found out that the idea of African socialism was used as a counter-ideology by post-colonial African leaders who have been described as African philosopher-kings. This African version of socialism is very different from the Marxist

version of socialism in the sense that the African socialism puts the African tradition and culture into consideration, and focuses on the welfare of the community of people. Despite the laudable influence of African socialism for pre and post independent formation of political ideologies in Africa, it also has its pitfalls which majorly bother on the inability of the people to fully understand the concept. Again, this kind of ideology has been criticized as having the potential to degenerate into tribal and racial ideology, instead of the continental ideology for which it was meant. We also understood that the major difference between the Western idea of capitalism and the African socialism is that, whereas Western capitalism teaches exploitation by the smartest, African socialism canvasses for the welfare of all within the community.

2.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

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|----|-----------------------|
| 1. | Fanon/Race/Tribe; |
| 2. | Leopold Sedar Senghor |

Unit 3 Witchcraft, Magic and Sorcery in African Philosophy

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 The Meaning of Witchcraft in African Philosophy
- 3.4 The Meaning of Sorcery and Magic in African Philosophy
- 3.5 A Comparison of Witchcraft, Magic and Sorcery
- 3.6 The Place of Witches in African Philosophy
- 3.7 The Place of Sorcerers and Magicians in African Philosophy
- 3.8 Summary
- 3.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 3.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

3.1 Introduction

Historically, almost all societies in the world have some form of witchcraft and sorcery, and Africa is not an exception. Mostly, witchcraft and sorcery are shrouded in mystical secrecy and there is also some controversy about their rationality and logic in the modern world. But in African traditional religion and philosophy, it is believed that witchcraft and sorcery form part and parcel of the rituals and ancient practices of the African people. Agbanusi (2016) opines that witchcraft and sorcery are part and parcel of the African immaterial and invisible reality. They form an integral part of the African spirituality, and have considerable influence in traditional medicine, exorcism, and so on. Agbanusi (2016: 117) also observes that different kinds of sicknesses and ailments can also be caused by witchcraft and sorcery, meaning that these practices can bring about either evil or good, depending on the situation and how they are put to use. So, one can safely infer that these practices are a two-edged sword, depending on how such powers are put to use.

Generally, witches are believed to be bad people who use their spiritual powers to inflict harm on other people. Parrinder (1976: 126) argues that witches are also alleged to be involved in cannibalism in African societies, and even the sucking of blood “in vampire fashion”. Furthermore, he opines that magic can properly be said to come from the African religion, its objects are, medicines, charms, amulets, talismans and mascots, which can also be seen in other parts of the world (Parrinder 1976: 113). Magic and medicine can be spoken of in almost the same fashion as magic is the source of the African medicine (Parrinder 1976: 113). The former is the spiritual dimension of what manifests physically and materially as the latter. So, African medicine, just as everything the African does, has a spiritual background which is embedded in magic. These phenomena are generally part and parcel of the African worldview,

though, as we have earlier noted, some controversies still exist as to their actual existence in reality. Some people have argued that these ideas are not in tune with the contemporary world, and if African nations must move forward and its pride of place among technologically advanced nations, we should do away with this kind of practices and beliefs. But the question remains, if African philosophy and belief system can afford to survive if these spiritual and metaphysical aspects of it are expunged.

3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the ideas of witchcraft, sorcery and magic in African metaphysics
- differentiate between the phenomena of witchcraft and magic
- relate the relationship of African traditional medicine to magic
- discuss the value of sorcerers in traditional African societies.

3.3 The Meaning of Witchcraft in African Philosophy

Ngangah (2020: 165) describes witchcraft as the act of using and employing magical chants and supernatural powers to manipulate nature, people, and social occurrences to achieve selfish or self-serving benefits for one's self or clients. Witchcraft comprises of two words, "witch" and "craft", and the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2019) describes it as the act of casting a spell in order to achieve some personal goals, whatever the nature of such goals. Witches generally use their own spiritual powers to execute destructive acts of personal revenge, ill will, envy, selfishness, or self-assertion (Ngangah 2020). Some witches who are eager to commercialize their powers also function as sorcerers. We can proceed from the above and categorize a witch as someone who cast spells and performs magical acts to demonize and hurt people or influence and limit their potential success (Ngangah 2020). This definition is gender blind, and so can serve as the meaning of wizard; a word normally used to describe male witches. On the other hand, craft can be seen as the act of doing something in a skillful way. So, witches employ skill in their act of harming people through spiritual and magical means. The meaning of witchcraft has to do with both the act itself and the belief in it in African traditional system. However, you should bear in mind that the definition of witchcraft is not necessarily a rigid one, as the phenomenon is dynamic, secretive and slippery in nature, but social research confirms that no matter how witchcraft is defined, the act will involve putting people in harm's way.

It can be said that witchcraft cannot be scientifically proven, but the nature of witchcraft can be described from the undeniable effects of witchcraft attacks in African traditional societies. Witches have always been associated with evil and people fear, hate and even seek to eliminate them wherever they are rumoured to exist (Nyabwari & Kagema 2014). Since witches are regarded in African traditional thought as people who oppose the natural order of harmonious community life, anything wrong or bad both in that society or in the world originates from witchcraft (ibid, p12). These include illnesses, hardships or misfortune. Mbiti (1982, p202) expresses that witchcraft could be hereditary and it involves the term used popularly and broadly to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical powers, generally in a secret fashion, and in all its manifestations. He goes ahead:

...African peoples believe that there are individuals who have access to mystical power which they employ for destructive purposes. In a non-scientific environment belief of this type cannot be 'clean' from fear, falsehood, exaggeration, suspicion, fiction, and irrationality. Whatever reality there is concerning witchcraft in the broad and popular sense of the term, the belief in it is there in every African village, and that belief affects everyone, for better or for worse. It is part of the religious corpus of beliefs (p, 202).

This simply implies that the belief and practice of witchcraft in African societies is shrouded in secrecy and mystery. Those who profess and believe do might not have any form scientific proof for it, but the act is replete in African tradition both in terms of belief and physical manifestation.

3.4 The Meaning of Sorcery and Magic in African Philosophy

In African traditional societies, there are evil and good sorcerers; the evil sorcerers are those witches who have commercialized their trade in order to render services to their clients and make money out of it, while the good sorcerers use their mystical powers for the good and wellbeing of the society (Agbanusi 2016). Here, we will focus on the good sorcerers who Parrinder (1976: 117) refers to as "white magicians". They are qualified medicine men who know how to manipulate the forces and mystical powers in nature to the advantage of the society (Parrinder 1976).

These medicine men and good sorcerers, diviners and seers are consulted almost by everyone in the traditional African society. They are well regarded and respected by the people, because they are always available to help sort out the spiritual dimensions of the society's problems. They are different from witches who are only interested in doing harm for their

own self ends. As Mbiti (1982) opines, a sorcerer can perform different functions in traditional African society; ranging from exorcism and spiritual healing, to being a medium of communication between the dead and the living. These sorcerers and diviners are the most popular figures in the African religious life. Agbanusi even notes that, with the advent of Christianity in Africa, some of these diviners and sorcerers flooded into the new religion, where they have continued to practice their trade, using tools provided by their new faith.

Parrinder (1976: 113) notes that a distinction between magic and medicine will be a difficult one. The former is the spiritual dimension of what manifests physically and materially as the latter. So, African medicine, just as everything the African does, has a spiritual background which is embedded in magic. Magic is part of the mystical powers available in African tradition. It is a means of protection, as well as a means of showcasing one's level of affinity and association with natural forces (Mbiti 1980). Simply put, it is the process of manipulation of natural and mystical forces to achieve a certain objective (Ngangah 2020), which means that all mystical phenomena in African traditional system are deeply rooted in magic. Without the art of magic, it is impossible for one to manipulate nature and achieve anything beyond the physical. Some magic are for defensive purposes, while other are for the enhancement of economic activities like haunting, business and agriculture (Nyabwari & Kagema 2014: 12). Some are used for healing and health, others for the sake of increasing attractiveness and love life, to acquire influence, and yet others for spiritual cleansing. The use of magic in African tradition forms part of the socio-economic life of the people, just as diviners and witchcraft.

3.5 A Comparison of Witchcraft, Magic and Sorcery in African Philosophy

As we have earlier noted, witches are selfish individuals who use mystical powers to cause harm on other individuals. The witch kills and harms with evil intentions and some African scholars like Mbiti (1980) has observed that, in African traditional societies, it is possible for witchcraft to be transferred from one generation to the other, meaning that an offspring could learn to practice it from a parent. Witches are regarded in African traditional thought as people who oppose the natural order of harmonious community life, anything wrong or bad both in that society or in the world originates from witchcraft (Mbiti 1980: 12). These include illnesses, hardships or misfortune of any kind. In fact, the African believes that nothing happens without a spiritual connotation, and since witches are responsible for spiritually inflicting harm on others, most of the misfortunes are traceable to them, with the exception of those coming as punishment from a certain spirit being or another.

someone immediately suspects evil magic as soon as something goes wrong in his life, and this is witchcraft which may be a manifestation of mystical forces that may be inborn or inherited (Mbiti 1977: 165). Witchcraft is a suspicious phenomenon in African traditional belief system, making it the possible culprit for any kind of mishap or misfortune in the life of the individual.

Mbiti (1977) says that people are not only willing to know the source of misfortunes and diseases, they are also interested in knowing the source of those misfortunes and mishaps, that is where positive magic comes in; helping people to find explanations and solutions to their challenges (Mbiti 1977: 167). But the evil magician will manipulate mystical powers and use them against unsuspecting individuals harmfully for his own selfish interests. So, there is a huge difference between positive magicians who work for the development of the community and the evil magicians who seek power and control just for the sake of it; and will go at any length to assert evil control on the rest of the community (Mbiti 1977: 168).

Parrinder (1976) notes that some the features of magic in African tradition include rain making, protective charms, amulets against natural forces, and so on. Hence, magic is an essential aspect of the African traditional system, because it provides the opportunity for the native African to be able to face nature and survive against natural forces in the community. Despite the fact that some people are using their magical powers for harmful purposes, it should be noted that magic is not intrinsically evil, but the application of the powers determine how any magical powers could be categorized.

Sorcery as we have earlier noted, is, in its positive state, a very good feature of the African traditional system. The sorcerers can act as medicine men that are consulted to proffer solutions to the health and psychological challenges of the people; using these powers (Parrinder 1976). There are also evil sorcerers who are witches that have decided to commercialize their trade in order to harm people on behalf of their clients. A sorcerer can use his mystical powers to provide spiritual help to the people; thereby giving them the solutions to whatever problems they might be experiencing (Mbiti 1977). Sorcerers also have the powers, just as magicians and witches, to call upon the spirit of the dead and act a link between the living and the long-departed family members (Parrinder 1976: 114). Fortune telling and divination are also part of the values of sorcerers in Africa; they do this by employing the magical powers in nature and manipulating it to the advantage of the people and their clients. Most people, especially those with Western ideology, believe that sorcery is associated with what they refer to as black magic, which they believe is intrinsically evil, but that is not entirely true, as

sorcery has been proven to be essential for the socio-economic progress of the society.

3.6 The Place of Witches in African Philosophy

Witches are feared and avoided in African traditional societies; they are believed to be behind most of the misfortunes befalling people and communities around them. Dirk (1996) argues that witchcraft accusations in Africa are associated with occult and mystical powers which the people think that the alleged witch have. Dirk (1996) has opined that the presence of witch doctors in African societies are helping to a large degree, in fight against the activities of witches who go about causing physical and economic harm to people with the use of mystical powers. The place of witches in African society is that of disdain and contempt; people do not want to hear about them as everybody believes that they are evil people who are working against the harmonious and peaceful existence of the community. It is believed that witches are only interested in showcasing and exercising their mystical powers; not minding the impact of such powers on the community and people involved (Dirk 1996). In most African communities, witches are either killed or ostracized, in order to cut every tie they might have with the community. When such witches are ostracized and isolated, they are usually forced to go on exile, far away from where the news of their witchcraft could travel (Dirk 1996). How does the society relate with these witches upon discovery?

Mbiti (1982) argues that, even when the witches are exiled out of the community, their clients could still travel as far as they are in order to consult them and contract them to assist them in their heinous activities. In any family where it is suspected that witches exist, it is almost impossible for the community to associate with members of the community, and even their women always find it hard to get men who will marry them within the community. It is also believed in Africa that witches are mostly old people who might have lived out their active years without achieving much; thereby using their old age to envy other people who might be making progress in their chosen careers and endeavors. Going by the African conception of personhood which we have examined earlier, witches who use their mystical powers to visit harm on fellow members of the community are not considered to be persons in the African worldview. This is because; such witches are working against the interest and welfare of the community. As we have noted, though there is no scientific proof for these African metaphysical beliefs, the fact that there are physical evidence of their reality among African societies makes it difficult for one to argue against.

3.7 The Place of Sorcerers and Magicians in African Philosophy

Sorcerers can either be good or evil; in African traditional societies, the evil sorcerers are those witches who have commercialized their trade in order to render services to their clients and make money out of it, while the good sorcerers use their mystical powers for the good and wellbeing of the society (Agbanusi 2016). But the good sorcerers are those who use their powers to affect the community positively. Sorcery also gives the people the opportunity, not only to find out about their misfortunes and challenges, but to also know the cause of it. Sorcerers can be in the form of seers and diviners who help to energize the physical and psychological cohesion of the society (Mbit 1977). The place of sorcery in the society will largely depend on how the sorcerers involved puts his powers to work, because as Ngangah (2020) notes, Africans do not generally probe the source of powers inasmuch as such powers are used to ameliorate their situations and make life better for them. The end of such powers justifies the means, even as it should be noted that, in the African traditional belief system, all powers are coming from the Supreme Being who we all call God. So, sorcerers are treated according to the value of the job they do and how the job affect the overall wellbeing of the members of the community. When a sorcerer goes rogue and decides to utilize his powers negatively, he is normally ostracized from the community, and in most cases, his homestead is razed down as a form of deterrent to others.

Just as we have said before, these entire phenomena are part and parcel of the African metaphysics. Magic is the very foundation of African metaphysics, and it is the basis of all the mythical and mystical activities in African religion. Dirk (1996) expresses that when an African does not understand the source of a particular power, he simply attributes it to magic. And magic, being the source of medicine, is very difficult to differentiate from medicine as Parrinder (1976). Magic is the art of manipulation of natural forces in order to achieve a certain objective (Ngangah 2020). Mbiti (1977) believes that, according to the belief of the African, there are powers deposited in nature, powers that belong to God, and are subject to manipulation by human beings to their own benefits. That is where magic comes in as a means of manipulating such powers. Magicians are widely sought after in Africa, basically for the preparation of different charms and amulets for social and economic purposes. Mbiti (1982) specifically mentions the act of rain making as a major kind of magic in Africa. The rain-maker is consulted and paid by individuals who want to avoid rain fall for one reason or the other within the community, because they know that the rain maker possesses the magical powers to cause the rain to fall.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ is the very foundation of African metaphysics, and it is the basis of all the mythical and mystical activities in African religion.
2. _____ are feared and avoided in African traditional societies; they are believed to be behind most of the misfortunes befalling people and communities around them.

3.8 Summary

In the African traditional communities, the names of these mystical phenomena often interchanged and one description could be used to apply to all of them. For example, a sorcerer could be described as a witch, a magician as a diviner, and so on. But one major fact here is that all these activities examined in this unit form a part of the African traditional religious life. Without these mystical attributes, the African traditional life will not be what it is, as will lose its ancient values and become unspiritual and therefore, unreligious. Though these beliefs and practices cannot be scientifically proven as we have said, they are undeniably experienced in the day- to- day affairs of the traditional African life. This unit has led us through the major spiritual and mystical beliefs and practices of the African tradition; we have understood the essence of diviners, sorcery and even the evil implications of witchcraft in the African traditional setting. Witches are recognized as the evil people of the community who manipulate natural powers to some selfish evil ends, and also capable of commercializing their trade in order to make money out of it. Sorcerers and medicine men are closely associated in that one could find it difficult to differentiate them, this is because, medicine in Africa is rooted in sorcery and magical powers which are used to manipulate nature and discover solutions to the medical and economic needs of man in the society.

3.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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3.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Magic;2. Witches |
|--|

Unit 4 Rituals and Festivals in African Tradition

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 The Meaning and Importance of Rituals
 - 4.3.1 Different Types of Rituals
 - 4.3.2 Festivals and their Benefits
 - 4.3.3 Mediums and Sacrifices
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

4.1 Introduction

This unit introduces you to the various rituals, sacrifices and festivals in the African traditional belief system. In African tradition, rituals and sacrifices are so important that they are believed to be the gateway to appeasing the gods, goddesses and other spirit beings. The ancestors too, noble men of the clan who had died at a ripe age and are believed to be in the land of the living dead, are also appeased by rituals and sacrifices. As we have noted in Module 1, unit 2, rituals and sacrifices are ways of worship in African religion, and provide authenticity to the worship of the individual person. This is done through festivals like music, singing, moving from place to another, clapping, beating of drums, in order to express the feeling of joy, sorrow or thanksgiving. When a member of the clan commits abomination, these rituals and sacrifices are needed to sanctify and cleanse the land; to avoid being punished by a malevolent spirit. In this unit, we shall expand more on the phenomena of rituals, sacrifices and festivals in African traditional belief system. Mbiti (1977: 126) defines rites and rituals as a religious ceremony or action. That is, the means of communicating something of religious significance through words, symbols and actions. Hence, rituals embody beliefs, and also, the ritual word and pattern must be a consistent one every time that same ritual is done. The nature of a ritual or sacrifice is always determined by the underworld; that is, the spirit being, god, goddess, or ancestor demanding such rituals and sacrifices. Some rituals are already known by the community, and those types of rituals and sacrifices are normally done periodically; daily, weekly, monthly, and even yearly rituals, festivals and sacrifices. Certain blessings from the gods demand certain rituals and festivals; like in the eastern part of Nigeria, New Yam Festivals are used to show appreciation to the god of yam for ensuring bountiful harvest, and also for the people to rejoice and make merry. There are rituals and sacrifices for virtually everything in African tradition; ranging from marriages, farming, naming ceremonies, rituals for a departed family member, and so on.

4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- critically examine the meaning of nature of rituals, sacrifices and festivals
- analyse the different forms of rituals in African tradition
- discuss the benefits of festivals
- analyse the place of mediums and sacrifices.

4.3 The Meaning and Importance of Rituals

A ritual is the act of carrying out a religious action or ceremony which has serious significance, through words, actions, prayers, and so on (Mbiti 1977). In the African traditional system, certain blessings from the gods demand certain rituals and festivals; like in the eastern part of Nigeria, New Yam Festivals are used to show appreciation to the god of yam for ensuring bountiful harvest, and also for the people to rejoice and make merry. There are rituals and sacrifices for virtually everything in African tradition; ranging from marriages, farming, naming ceremonies, rituals for a departed family member, and so on. A ritual can be in form of prayers, sacrifices, incantations and invocations, libations, kind words of blessing, and so on. As we have said severally in the course of our study, the African believes that reality has both physical and spiritual dimensions; and both dimensions are inseparably tied that one cannot afford to distinguish one from the other. Hence, any situation the African finds himself; whether it be a blessing or a curse, he resorts to finding a way of wither to show gratitude in the time of peace and blessing, or to plead and appease in the of hardship, sorrow and difficulty. That is where rituals and sacrifices come in; they are used as means of expressing joy, sorrow, or gratitude to the spirit beings and gods. Rappaport (1999) agrees with Mbiti that ritual action is the ground from which religious conceptions spring. Watson-Jones & Legare (2016) have defined rituals as socially stipulated group conventions widely used across cultures for a variety of functions. Mbiti (1977, p126) has observed that the ritual words help people to have the feeling exercising a certain amount of control over the invisible world and the forces of nature, man then feels himself not to be only a passive creature, but a cognitive agent.

In engaging in rituals, there is great focus on the process of it, which must be carried out religiously as has been stipulated by the medicine man directing such rituals (ibid, p47). This simply means that in African societies, rituals are strictly done according to social stipulations, so individual innovations are not welcome. There must be uniformity of procedure as long as the motive and type of ritual remains the same (Legare & Nielson 2015). Rituals help in improving social group

cohesion and unity among African communities in the sense that when everyone knows the importance of facilitated and coordinated problem solving mechanism, people become gradually bound together with the society. This means that rituals provide the capacity to engage in cooperation among the people of the community; thereby strengthening unity and coalitional alliances. However, Watson-Jones & Legare (2016) argues that in larger local communities, there could be some difficulties and challenges in coordinating individual members for such joint actions and ensuring their commitments to group goals, especially when such rituals involve the entire community. Hobson, et al (2018) have identified that when the smallest details of such rituals are missing, or are not in place, the whole process becomes meaningless, so the rules of the rituals cannot be relaxed because they have significant meaning to the individual and the community.

4.3.1 Different Types of Rituals

In the African traditional religious system, there are different forms of rituals that the people perform in order to maintain physical cohesion and harmony with the spirit beings and gods. Mbiti (1977: 126) observes that some of these rituals have to do with the life of the individual from birth to death. There are rituals for wars, raids or even natural calamities. The ritual words help people to have the feeling of exercising a certain amount of control over the invisible world, and the forces of nature; man then feels himself not to be only a passive creature, but a cognitive agent (Mbiti 1977). J.S Mbiti, in his *Introduction to African Religion* (1977), has been able to identify different types of rituals, ranging from personal rituals, agricultural rituals, health rituals, homestead rituals, and professional rituals. How can we understand these? We shall now examine them briefly:

- i. Personal rituals are rituals performed along the life journey of the individual. They start during pregnancy, and continue to birth, naming, teething, puberty, circumcision, initiation, marriage, childbearing, eldership, death, and even to when one become an ancestor (Mbiti 1977: 127). This is not to say that rituals are performed at every stage we have mentioned in every African society, but there are rituals designed for the various stages, and it depends on the current traditions in any community. Some chose to do at birth, others at circumcision, and yet others at childbearing or even death. Mbiti insists that this kind of ritual has a way drawing attention to the individual; telling him that he matters, as well as the world around him. Since this ritual is according to different stages of life, they separate the individual from one phase of life and him up with another;

- ii. Agricultural rituals largely have to do with farming, hunting, fishing, as well as food-gathering. African peoples have been involved in agriculture since creation, and these rituals have been evolved to cover these means of livelihood. The ritual of rain-making is one of the rituals that is associated with farming, rituals, sacrifices and offerings are made to pray publicly for rain; especially when it seems to have delayed. Knowing that rain is important for farming purposes, African peoples have been able to evolve ritual that helps to attract rainfall whenever it is needed. Mbiti also asserts that there are rituals meant to reduce or stop the rain (ibid). The rain-making ritual comes before the planting season in order to help renew and sanctify life for both human beings and other creatures. There are also planting, harvest, first fruits, and stock-keeping rituals;
- iii. Health rituals have to do with the good health of the individual and the community. Africans use religion to find out the mystical cause of diseases, who is responsible, and ways of tackling them. These rituals are religious practices aimed at physical wellbeing. The medicine man specifies the kind of rituals that will be countermeasures to the source and cause of the sickness, thereby neutralizing them (Mbiti, 1977, p134). The death of many individuals in the society is believed to have a cause, hence, many rituals are performed to prevent such death, delay, or to ward it off (Mbiti 1977). Even at death, part of the funeral rites will be the chasing away of death from the family of the diseased. The homestead and the surrounding environment are purified ritually, in order to restore normal life within the family;
- iv. Homesteads rituals cover the homestead, it is for the purpose of new house, barns, fencing of cattle sheds, hospitality to guests and visitors, and rituals meant to welcome new born babies, marriages and so on. These rituals, as Mbiti (1977) claims, are meant to bring about blessing upon the homestead, to remove impurities of sickness, strengthen social ties, and define the duties and rights of different members of the family; and
- v. Professional rituals have to do with the many activities that demand a certain measure of skill or training. They are majorly used in hunting and fishing; in the making and use of spears, bows, arrows, canoes, the trapping and tracking of animals and so on. Other forms of professional rituals as Mbiti says, are concerned with work of medicine men, diviners, oracles, priests, rain-making, blacksmiths, and magicians (Mbiti 1977). Another category of people who maintain a high standard of professional rituals are the kings, chiefs, queens, rulers and other traditional

leaders. These rituals are intended to maintain order and harmony in the community.

4.3.2 Festivals and their Benefits

Festivals have been identified to be part and parcel of the religious process, and can also add to the grandeur of both personal and communal rites. Festivals for individuals and families may accompany birth, initiation, marriages, and funerals (Mbiti 1977: 136). The community also has harvest festivals (like the New Yam Festival), planting festivals, haunting festivals, and fishing festivals. We also have victory festivals when the community has won a war or warded off an invasion, coronation festivals for kings, chiefs and queens. One major benefit of festivals is the renewal of the life of the community and the entertainment of the people, example of this is the masquerade dance in many parts of Africa. This helps the tension within the community to find an outlet and ensures social cohesion among the members of the community. Artistic talents are developed and utilized in the process; in the form of art, music, drama, and even oral communication (ibid). In most cases, the festival involves belief about the unseen world, so the link between human beings and the spirits are renewed, and the two worlds kept in distant but healthy relationship. People also use that occasion to solicit blessings from God and the ancestors, and by so doing, the visible and invisible worlds coexist for the benefit of man. These festivals also serve as religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of the community. Without them, as Mbiti (1977: 140) opines, African life will be dull and uninteresting.

Life is all about happiness as human beings, in the chaotic and stressful planet we inhabit, festivals are responsible for bringing positivity into life and living. They centre on cultural and ethnic topics which seek to inform the members of the community of their customs and traditions; involving community elders who share stories and experiences to the younger ones, in order to give them the needed experience (Hobson & Schroeder 2018). These rituals recognize the essence of unity and togetherness within the community and give every member a sense of belonging. Oral tradition is the basic means of transferring the African values and way of life to the next generation, and festivals where folklores, proverbs and wise saying are made become a vehicle for the transmission of these values and customs. By so doing, the new generation will grasp the basic tenets of the cultural values and traditions of the people.

4.3.3 Mediums and Sacrifices

The main function of the mediums is to find out hidden secrets of knowledge and pass them to other people. They are people who get in touch with spirit world; they can be compared with diviners and medicine men (Mbiti 1977). They are usually led to the spirit world by the use of drums, dances, and singing, until they become possessed. Under that possession, they may do things they would not have done their normal self. The diviners, medicine man or priest is usually in charge of the medium, and is able to interpret and explain whatever he says under the influence of the spirits. Most of the communication through mediums is one sided, as people hardly have messages to deliver to the spirit world. The medium tells where to find lost things, who may have bewitched a sick person, the type of ritual and medicine needed to cure people's troubles, and whether an intended journey will be a success or not (Mbiti 1977: 157). Like other specialists, mediums also need to be trained, such training are done under older mediums that are intent on passing the knowledge across to the new generation. Mbiti asserts that in some cases, a particular spirit may request a certain person to become their medium for a specified period or even infinitely (Mbiti 1977: 157). The training of mediums involves chanting some prayers, singing professional songs, dancing, and the necessary exercise for spirit possession.

Sacrifices are the results of the work done by the mediums. They are to identify a kind of sacrifice needed to sort out a particular problem. When sacrifices are made without contacting the necessary mediums, people run the risk of doing the wrong sacrifices and having their sacrifices rejected by the gods and spirits. Mediums, seers and medicine men consult with the spirit world in order to find out the type of sacrifices necessary for a certain problem or ailment. There are also sacrifices are designated and meant for a particular spirit being or the other, this type sacrifice is well known by all concerned and is done within specified periods, usually a year (Mbiti 1977). Different spirits demand different sacrifices from their worshippers, so the people are well, aware of the mode and process of sacrifices to be done for such spirit and gods.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. Sacrifices are the results of the work done by the _____.
2. _____ have been identified to be part and parcel of the religious process, and can also add to the grandeur of both personal and communal rites.

4.4 Summary

It is hard to claim any form of strict uniformity among African peoples concerning their rituals, festivals and sacrifices, but one major fact is that, no matter the form the rituals take, they all have one goal in mind – that of strengthening physical cohesion and finding solutions to the problems of the individuals and the community. These phenomena are basic ingredients for African religion, philosophy and general living, hence, if they are not there, African society and living will be a dull and uninteresting one. In this unit, we have been able to examine and analyse the phenomena of rituals, sacrifices and festivals in the African traditional society. We have also observed that in every African society, these things form the basic nuclei for social living and cohesion. For example, the New Yam Festival in eastern Nigeria provides an opportunity for the people to bond together socially and give an outlet for their frustrations and failings. These rituals and festivals are normally performed by professional and qualified individuals who have the ability to communicate with spirit world and bring out solutions to the problems bedeviling the people. There are different types of rituals; ranging from agricultural, homestead, personal, and professional rituals. And the mediums are very important in the scheme of things because they are the ones trained specifically to travel spiritually to the spirit world in order to find answers to the questions we ask.

4.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mediums;2. Festivals |
|--|

End of Module Questions

1. Mediums also need to be trained (a) True (b) Not necessary (b) False (b) Both (a) and (b)
2. _____ are rituals performed along the life journey of the individual
3. _____ help in improving social group cohesion and unity among African communities in the sense that when everyone knows the importance of facilitated and coordinated problem solving mechanism, people become gradually bound together with the society.
4. _____ seen as a religious ceremony or action
5. _____ largely have to do with farming, hunting, fishing, as well as food-gathering.

MODULE 3 SOME AFRICAN WORLDVIEWS AND BELIEFS

Unit 1	The Universe and Nature in African Worldview
Unit 2	Destiny and Fate in African Philosophy
Unit 3	Moral Thinking in African Philosophy
Unit 4	The African Traditional Religion

Unit 1 The Universe and Nature in African Worldview

Unit Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 African Views of the Universe and Nature
 - 1.3.1 The Nature of the Universe
 - 1.3.2 The Place of Man in the Universe
 - 1.3.3 Mystical and Religious Order in the Universe
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

1.1 Introduction

This unit will attempt to avail you some information about the African conception of the universe and nature in general. The African people generally believe that the universe is created, and the creator is an all-powerful and almighty being who is called God. There is no agreement on how the creation of the universe happened, but since it seems impossible that the universe created itself, God is therefore the explanation for the origin of the universe, both visible and invisible realities. In many African communities, God is also called *The Creator*, even if there are still other names which can be used to describe Him. When African says that the universe has been created by God, they are actually looking at the universe in a religious way (Mbiti 1977). Africans see it as a religious universe and also treat it as such. This is because, as we have said earlier, the African believes that reality is both physical and spiritual intertwined in one inseparable link. This religious interpretation of the universe helps the African to have a sense of purpose and direction, and also make him to exercise some measure of control over his environment (Anthony 2013). The universe and reality in general are very important to the traditional African that is the reason why it is said that the African sees man at the centre of the universe and nature, and does not seek to alter the universe but to nurture it. The universe is divisible into two, there are visible and invisible parts of it; but

African peoples do not think of these parts as different but as bound together. Therefore, this unit will examine some basic African beliefs about nature and the universe, and we shall as much as possible, try to help the student acquire a better understanding of nature and the universe from the African perspective.

1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the nature of the universe
- explain the place of man in the universe
- analyse its mystical and religious order
- discuss the African views of the universe.

1.3 African View of Nature and the Universe

African peoples have long observed and reflected the world around them as they went through life. They looked at the sky above, with its moon, star, sun and meteorites: with its clouds, rains, rainbows, and the movement of the wind. And below they saw the earth and its myriads of forms, animals, insects, rocks and mountains. They became aware of the limits of the powers and knowledge of man, and the shortness of his life. They also experienced the process of birth, growth, procreation and death: they felt agonies of the body and mind, hunger and thirst, and emotions like joy, fear and love. These experiences and more exposed them to begin to think about the universe in which they live. And the outcome of this exposure was the gradual formulation of the African views and ideas about the world and the universe at large (Mbiti 1977: 31). The challenges that the world, universe and nature posed to the ancient Africans made to begin to form views about the universe and the world. Africans formed this view gradually, while investigating and observing physical nature. The reflections on the physical manifestations of the universe gave way for the African view on the universe; therefore, the African has been a very keen observer of nature and the environment.

All over the world, no thinking person can live without forming some views about the world and life. This might be through individual reflections which might eventually spread to the rest of the community and society at large (Mbiti 1977). The spread of the African idea of the universe happens through discussions, artistic expressions, and so on (Mbiti 1977). They are mainly done by extending old ideas, abandoning some of them, acquitting new one and translating others into practical realities (Mbiti 1977: 31). The African believes that he should be friends with nature and the universe that he should protect and preserve her at any cost. One major difference between the Western and African views of

nature, the environment and the universe is that, while the African can go at any length to protect the universe, the Westerner is ready to sacrifice the wellbeing of the universe and nature at the altar of economic prosperity and technological advancement. The West is ready to jettison the concerns about the environment just for them to remain at the top echelon of world technology and economy. For us in Africa, we do not rob the environment for selfish reasons of economy and technological advancement. The African believes that the universe and man are one and the same; man being the creature entrusted with the care and maintenance of the universe and nature.

The desperate attempt by the West to remain the most technologically advanced region of the world has continued to put the planet in danger, that is why we challenged like global warming and climate change which are threatening to change the earth as we know it and make it inhabitable for human life. The world is said to be in a race against time as it stands to save the planet and preserve it for generations yet unborn. That is the more reason why the world should begin to look into this African idea of preserving the universe and making sure that we don't allow scientific and technological advancement to render mankind homeless. Therefore, in this regard, the world still has a lot to learn and gain from Africa.

1.3.1 The Nature of the Universe

According to Mbiti (1977), many African societies believe that the universe is divided into two parts; the visible one which is the earth, and the invisible one which is the heavens. But yet, some other societies believe that the universe is a three-tiered creation of God; the heavens, the earth, and the underworld which lies below, and Africans believe that these divisions are not quite different but keenly tied together. The heavenly part of the universe is the home of the stars, sun, moon, and the meteorites; the sky, the wind and the rain and all other phenomena connected to them like thunder, rain, lightening, storms, eclipses, and so on. Ijioma (2005: 84) corroborates this view by insisting that the underworld is where the ancestors and some bad spirits reside. Idang (2015) has argued that the wellbeing of the universe is a part of the African cultural values. Because the African believes that man is part and parcel of the universe, they exist as integral parts of the indivisible creation of God, if man fails to protect the universe, he is also failing to protect and preserve himself. The African view of the universe is a unified reality, as there is a strong interaction between the unseen or spiritual and the seen or physical world (Anthony 2013: 552).

The universe being studied under this module also implies reality in general. The interaction and relationship between the two worlds evoke a sense of the sacred in the African, because he sees and feels the presence of the Supreme Being, divinities and spirit beings (the ancestors). The universe is one indivisible creation of God, and man, being at the centre of it, has the responsibility to preserve and protect it. Although man comes from God, but his birth is not a separation from God. He still connects to God through libations, and other prayers and food for the gods and the ancestors. Ijioma (2005: 87) maintains that in prayer, the Igbo African tries to normalize the relationship among the three worlds; libation is made to God through the ancestors, and other deities. Man is just an individual person, but one born by destiny into the community and whose survival and purpose is linked with the purpose and survival of the community. This means that the human person is first, a member of community, clan or kindred (Ijioma 2005). The way African see and perceive the universe affects the way they see reality, which in turn, affects their value systems and traditional orientation (Anthony 2013: 533). The nature of the African universe is the African worldview for the meaning of life, it is an unconscious but a natural tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning often seen as the origin and end (Anthony 2013). What is the fundamental basis of the African universe?

The nature of the African universe is the underlying thought link that hold together the Africa value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rituals, rites, rules, ideas, cognition and theologies (Anthony 2013: 533- 534).

1.3.2 The Place of Man in the Universe

As we have severally said, man is at the centre of the African universe. The whole exists for the sake of man, so the African looks for the usefulness of the universe to man; this means both what the world can do for man and how man can use the world for his own good (Mbiti 1977: 38). That is one of the reasons that many people in Africa have divided the animals into what man can eat and what man cannot eat. We also look at plants as what can be eaten, what can be used for curative and medical purposes, what can be used for building, fire and so on (Mbiti 1977). Some things have physical uses, others have religious uses in form of ceremonies rituals and symbols, and some other things are used for magical purposes. Mbiti (1977) avers that the African peoples believe that objects and phenomenon are inhabited by living beings that is having a mystical life. This belief helps man to control this mystical life through offerings, libations and sacrifices, giving him a feeling of confidence and security. This feeling is also a feeling of harmony with nature and with the universe, man has to seek such harmony to avoid

being destroyed by the spirit beings and gods that inhabit the earth. Being at the centre of the universe, man tries to use his position to derive some physical, mystical and supernatural influences. Man sees the universe in terms of himself and endeavours to live in harmony with it. Both man and the universe are intertwined, one and the same.

Man is not the master of the universe but he is only a friend, a user, a beneficiary, for that reason he has no other option but to live in harmony with the universe; obeying the natural, moral and mystical laws of the orderly universe. If the harmony and laws of nature are unduly disturbed, man will be at the receiving end of it. The universe is a protective force for man, hence, when its natural order is disturbed, man loses that privilege of protection and shelter. Mbiti (1982) suggests that, that is the reason why African peoples refer to the universe as *Mother Nature*. This is to assert her protective and caring role over man. Without the universe man is nothing, and we are created into orderly cosmos, giving the responsibility to continue to uphold that order. And the fact that nature is acting as a mother means that at death, the African is given back to the mother, which is the source of his existence in the first place. Nature receives man at the end of every physical incarnation. African peoples have come to these conclusions through experiences, observations and reflections about the universe. Distant ancestors of Africans who long settled on the earth observed these things and passed them on to the next generations through oral traditions like folklores, proverbs, and wise sayings. Analysing this idea, Nyang (1980: 29) has this to say:

According to this view man is more than a spectator on the stage of life, though he is a creature who is circumscribed within the parameter set by the spiritual ancestors and the evil spirits, man still imposes his own will on both the material and spiritual worlds. For man to function effectively in the material world, he must indeed learn to pursue his human needs and personal interests without antagonizing the spiritual forces above. Man in traditional African cosmology is caught in a matrix of spiritual relationships. There are the unbreakable ties to the Supreme Being, who created the earth and everything therein for man and his progeny. These ties are unbreakable because man's existence depends upon his creator.

Man lives his life in fear of endangering the life of his community as a result of bad relation with the universe. And his understanding of this matrix puts premium on good behavior and respect for communal customs and practices.

In other words, African traditional man learns to be obedient and religious at all times, this is because he knows that the cosmic order abhors people who disrespect religious commands and rituals. The sense of obedience and harmony hinges on the African man's understanding

that universe is a religious one, and everything within it dances to a cosmic music whose tunes and rhythms echo the words of the spiritual forces. Without the spiritual forces, man is nothing. Life is understood as a distant dialogue with the sacred, and each passing moment demands devotion to the spiritual forces and the words of religious communication and communion from their lips. The African man is both the manipulator of spiritual powers and the target of such powers, and the traditional perception of man as showed in *Bantu philosophy* has been described as vitalistic; that is, based on the belief that life is a vital unity and that the human being is only a point on the cosmic circle of life (Nyang 1980: 29).

The African man believes that the link between the ancestors and their current successors comes from the unity of blood and the common life which circulates in the veins of all the members of the community. In terms of destiny, the African man believes that he is being given a destiny to fulfill in the world. This destiny might vary from group to group, but man is viewed as a cosmic traveler who is destined to cross the equator of death. This equator serves a demarcation between two inseparable portions of total reality (Nyang 1980).

1.3.3 Mystical and Religious Order in the Universe

The African man believes that the universe is not on autopilot. There it is a mystical and religious universe which has laws that should be followed and obeyed by man himself who is at the centre of creation. The world has been created by the God who also put laws that should guide the conduct and attitude of man as he goes about seeking sustenance in the universe. These laws, as we have noted earlier, are meant for the preservation of harmony and cosmic peace in the universe. For example, we have the law of sowing and reaping, which enables man to till the ground and cultivate it, in order to harvest and reap bountifully from the earth. In this cosmic and religious order in the universe, it is forbidden for anyone to seek to upturn it, the African sees such a person as being at war with nature, and no one survives such. Mbiti (1977) opines that the African belief that the universe is created and sustained by God lays credence to the thought that the laws of nature are being controlled directly by God through His servants. The morals and institutions of the society are believed to have been given by God; hence any breach of such moral laws is an offence against God and the spirits. The African believe in taboos which help to strengthen and keep the moral and religious order in the community. These taboos range from words, dresses, foods, relations among people, marriages, burials, work and so on. Breaking a taboo entails punishment in form of social ostracism, misfortune and even death. If the people do not punish the offender, then the spirit world will punish him through one malevolent spirit or the other.

These views point to the idea that the invisible world of God and the spirits is actively engaged in the affairs of man in the universe. Orderliness is the hallmark of the African universe because the world itself is created by a Being who is in charge of it by established laws and values. An act of violence is viewed as an act disturbing the equilibrium and balance of the community. The moral imperative is to achieve right relationships between the individual, the community and the environment, and is self-evidently right (Hammond-Tooke 1998: 8). This order also has to do with the relationship among human beings in the community; it should be a healthy one in which people will love and care for their fellows, and make sure that welfare of other community comes above that of the individual. Bujo (2008: 22) asserts that the essence of order in the African cosmology is quite different from the idea of order in the West. The Western idea of order and morality centre on the individual person and his ability to employ reason, whereas the African conception of mystical and religious order has to do more with the community. The morality is closely related to the communal embeddedness of the social bearing. This also correlates to the African concept of *UBUNTU*: I am because we are. Morality is not an individual one per se, but according to the relationship and fellowship with the lives of others. The community is also beyond just the physical as it includes both the ancestors and even those yet unborn (Bujo 2003: 23-24).

Achebe (1998: 70) states that there is a form of individualism in the Igbo African cosmology, as man is said to be both a unique creation and work of a unique creator, an idea underscoring individualism. But this individualism is not absolute as the will of the community is always upheld and no single person can win judgment against the community. The African mystical and religious morals should be considered in cases of ethical justification of actions and customs, and not some kind of ghetto morality which will condone all kinds of customary practices as good (Bujo 2003). This means that the mystical and religious moral code in traditional African thought is not the acceptance of any kind of customary laws and practices, but respect to instituted moral codes of nature, which we call natural laws. For instance, adultery can only be judged in terms of the kind of marriage involved. In monogamous marriages, the meaning of adultery clearly differs from the meaning in polygamous marriages.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. The _____ believes that the link between the ancestors and their current successors come from the unity of blood and the common life which circulates in the veins of all the members of the community.
2. Mbiti suggests that, that is the reason why African peoples refer to the universe as _____

1.4 Summary

It is evident that the concept of religion has a lot of influence in the African idea of the universe. The African believes that the universe is a created and ordered cosmos, with man at the centre of it. Man also makes serious efforts to abide by these rules and laws made by God which are meant to provide harmony and peace between man and the invisible universe and between man and his community. This interaction and obedience to cosmic laws help man to have a sense of control and security; he is able to manipulate some natural powers to achieve his goal of sustenance. In other words, African traditional man learns to be obedient and religious at all times, this is because he knows that the cosmic order abhors people who disrespect religious commands and rituals. The sense of obedience and harmony hinges on the African man's understanding that universe is a religious one, and everything within it dances to a cosmic music whose tunes and rhythms echo the words of the spiritual forces. In this unit we have been able to evaluate the African idea of the universe and reality in general. We have also analysed the concepts of order, nature of the universe, the place of man, and the relationship between the invisible and visible universe. The traditional African views reality and the universe as one; and having divinely ordained laws that are meant to be obeyed by man, in order to see to the harmony and tranquility of the universe. When the universe is distressed, man himself is distressed because the universe and man are part and parcel of the same reality. And man, being at the centre of this reality, carries out his moral, religious and mystical obligations through the community. Without the community, man is reduced to nothing because it is the community that attaches personhood to him. If the harmony and laws of nature are unduly disturbed, man will be at the receiving end of it. The universe is a protective force for man, hence, when its natural order is disturbed, man loses that privilege of protection and shelter.

1.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | | |
|----|---------------|
| 1. | African; |
| 2. | Mother Nature |

Unit 2 **Destiny and Fate in African Philosophy**

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 The Meaning and Nature of Destiny and Fate
 - 2.3.1 The Role of Destiny and Fate
 - 2.3.2 Relationship between Character and Destiny
 - 2.3.3 Death and Reincarnation
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

2.1 Introduction

Balogun (2007: 119) sees destiny and fate as the belief in African tradition that whatever happens or that will happen in the future, has already been preordained and will happen according to an earlier master plan. It is the mysterious power believed to control human events. It is the belief that every person has his biography written before he came to this world, and anything he does will be a fulfillment of that. The African traditional believer takes the issue of destiny and fate very seriously; this is because there is nothing that happens to a person in the world which is not linked to this destiny. The Igbo call it *Chi*, meaning a personal fate which invisibly follows the person around in the world. As many Africans believe that the universe is a mystical and religious world governed by the Supreme Being and other spirit beings, as well as the ancestors, these spirit beings apportion a destiny/fate to each person as he is being born into the earth. The Yoruba calls this destiny *Ori*, which is believed to be not only the bearer of destiny but to be the essence of the human personality, which rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of the person (Idowu 1962: 170). Africans also believe that every person has the moral responsibility to be at peace with, protect and be in good terms with his destiny in order for one to be able to fulfill his destiny easily. In this module, we shall use the terms destiny and fate interchangeably. Personal responsibility and good behavior will go a long way to help one maintain a good relationship with his *Chi* and be able to have good destiny. This simply means that man in African tradition is the centre piece of the concept of destiny. Good character produces good destiny and fate, while bad character and inordinate behavior will inevitably attract bad destiny for a person. So, the concept of destiny and fate in African worldview is not a strictly deterministic idea. This means that though a particular destiny is given to one at birth, moral character and good behaviors still go a long way in shaping one's destiny on earth. Again, one can also approach the spirit world through diviners, libations,

sacrifices and offerings in order to change one's bad destiny to a better one (Balogun 2007). The African believe that the fulfillment of every destiny solely depends on how the person involved decides to live. This process is the wheel and circle of life which is from birth, growth, adulthood, old age, death, reincarnation, and in that order. Boston (1970) says that a man's relationship with his guardian spirit and with the other spirit expresses the notion that his destiny is not entirely of his own making, but is determined partly by forces beyond his control. The Supreme Being and the spirits apportion destiny to man, it then depends on the actions of man to realize and fulfill such destiny.

2.2 Intended Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the concept of destiny and fate in African tradition
- analyse the role of destiny in the earthly life of man
- explain the influence of moral character on destiny
- explain the concepts of death and reincarnation as part of the African idea of destiny.

2.3 Meaning and Nature of Destiny/Fate

Destiny is the choice the individual made with the almighty God before birth. This choice is made from the aid of the supernatural power. And a man has responsibility to protect and guard his good destiny by good character, humility, and sincerity. Above all, he must continue to persistently propitiate the supernatural by means of offerings, libations, rituals, rites, and so on, in order to ward off evil powers or forces from interfering with his destiny (Boston 1970). On the other hand, when an African is challenged by misfortune, he does not relent against the evil forces that are believed to have imbued his life with bad destiny. He will relentlessly consult the oracles in order to find out the cause of the bad destiny, ill-fates and misfortune, and how to counter it and attract good fortunes. When the oracle has pronounced the solution to the bad destiny, they will perform the appropriate rites and rituals to the spirit world, hoping that such bad destiny will be changed. Some Africans also believe that the lines on the palms of each individual show the person's destiny and fate. Destiny in the African concept covers the entire life of man from birth to the grave, and even to reincarnation. Ukwamedua and Omokpo (2016) contend that every child from birth has been destined to fulfill a purpose on earth, and such destiny is a unique one. The Igbo believes that there are three basic factors that determine the success or failure of the individual: the benevolence of one's *Chi*, one's own efforts symbolized by the *IKENGA* or the power of actions, and one's conscious efforts to maintain the laws and customs of the

community (Ukwamedua and Omokpo 2016: 278).

The Igbo call it *Chi*, meaning a personal fate which invisibly follows the person around in the world. As Africans believe that the universe is a mystical and religious world governed by the Supreme Being and other spirit beings, as well as the ancestors, these spirit beings apportion a destiny/fate to each person as he is being born into the earth. The Yoruba calls this destiny *Ori*, which is believed to be not only the bearer of destiny but to be the essence of the human personality, which rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of the person (Idowu 1962: 170). It also instructive to note that this destiny is not fatal and deterministic, one has to put in efforts and good moral character in order to fulfill his destiny on earth. Without good morals, one's destiny maybe be adversely affected and he will suffer ill-fate and misfortune. So, one continues to desperately guard his fate and destiny by avoiding bad behaviors and inordinate ambitions, in order to keep his good destiny alive. In the event of a misfortune and ill-fate, the African consults the oracles through the medicine men and diviners, in order to find out the cause of such misfortunes and remedy them by means of sacrifices and other offerings to the spirit world. In the African cosmology, one can appease and even appeal to his guardian spirit, in order to avert a calamity or misfortune. The African also believes that death is part of the destiny of man, and it cannot be averted by anyone. Every person will die, those who had lived good moral lives and died at ripe ages will become ancestors who will oversee the activities of the clan from the spirit world.

Some Africans also believe that there is nothing like destiny which is distinct from the personal life and behavior of a person. That what we call destiny is simply an accumulation of the personal character of a person which has translated into his own life. As Ekanola (2006) argues against the idea of a divinely fixed fate:

Choices, if they are consistently made in the same pattern, coalesce into habits and later into character. A person's character, which is a product of past acts of free choice, to a large extent, determines destiny on earth. Character is all that is requisite. There is no destiny to be called unhappy in Ife City. Character is all that is requisite. However, in Ekanola (2006), I also argued that when there seems to be no correlation between a person's character and how his or her life turns out, the concept of *Ori* (destiny) connotes "the will of God" or "luck."

That is the argument against the concept of destiny as ordained by any form of spiritual being. Man, as some Africans believe, is totally in charge of his destiny by the kind of attitude and characters he displays and by the fulfillment of his moral obligations as we have earlier said. This school of thought believe that man was not assigned any form of

destiny while coming into the earth, but has to create his own destiny by his own hands by the kind of life he leads, and by his relationship with his community and clan. Since man is free, his free choices accumulate to give him the form of destiny he deserves. He cannot have what he does not deserve as nature rewards according to what each person has done; that is destiny.

2.3.1 The Role of Destiny and Fate

One's destiny has a significant role to play in his life. That is why the traditional African believes that the oracles have to be consulted to find out the nature of one's destiny, and possibly, reshape it if things are not going well with such a person. The Igbo believes that everything that happens in a man's life is traceable to his destiny, which is his *Chi*. There is nothing anybody can do or achieve in life outside his *Chi*. This personal destiny guides and directs one in the course of life, that is why the Igbo believes that *Onye buru Chi ya uzo, ya agbabuo onwe ya na oso*, meaning that if one tries to run faster than his destiny, he will run to his death. One must operate and conduct himself according to how his destiny has been fashioned. If one suffers any form of misfortune or ill-fate the African will believe that it was destined to be so. So, in African society, destiny and fate act as social agents for good moral living and social cohesion. This is because, each person will struggle to live according to the prescribed moral rules in order not to attract the anger of the spirit world and inflict ill-fate on himself. The belief in destiny and fate also helps to create a moral society where crime and criminality is eschewed. As Mbiti (1982) opines, this fear of bad destiny helps the individual to understand that his own destiny is tied to the destiny of the community, and even the destiny of the universe. Therefore, if a person refuses to live well in the community or goes about distorting the cosmic order of the universe, the repercussion will come and he will partake of it.

In relation to the community, knowing that his destiny is tied to that of his brother gives the traditional African a sense of responsibility, and makes him to avoid harming his brother. That is why the concept of being one's brother's keeper becomes important because, according to the idea of communal destiny, whatever affects one's clansman or relative also affects him. This is because in African traditional setting, people share in the fortune and misfortune of each member of the community. Nobody is allowed to carry his burden alone (Mbiti 1982). For instance, issues of birth, death, burials and so on are handled communally. The community might even go to the extent of restricting movements on certain days in order to accord a departed member a befitting burial. Whatever anyone does, it is done towards enhancing the welfare and destiny of the community since one cannot escape the

communal destiny, even if individualism is not totally absent. One other role of destiny and the idea of fate is hard work. It encourages hard work among the traditional Africans, knowing that man has a lot to do in order to fulfill his destiny on earth, the traditional African avoids being lazy, but works very hard to actualize his destiny and escape poverty. The traditional African respects hard work so much, believing that achievement and success will inevitably follow.

2.3.2 Relationship between Character and Destiny

Characters like honesty, hard work, humility, and relationship with the community go a long way to shape and affect one's destiny. As Ekanola (2006) has observed, there is a great link between one's personal character and approach to life and his destiny. "The will of God" or "luck" is used to describe one's success in life when the African cannot find any empirical reasons for such fortune (Ekanola 2006: 7). The idea of a chosen *Ori*, that is destiny, is no more than a complex of all the various acts of free choice made by individuals up till any specified time in their life. It is not by any prenatal choice in heaven (Ekanola 2006: 7). And industry and hard work form an integral part of choice. When man decides to be lazy, his destiny will also be tied to laziness, and when a man decides to go about suspending and offending natural laws with reckless abandon, that is also what will accumulate to become his destiny. As we have noted before, the law of sowing and reaping shows that the earth rewards people according to actions and reactions put into it. The African also believes that one will reap whatever he sows in nature, when the reaping occurs, one should understand that it is also destiny. One should not become a passive participant in the affairs of nature, but one should be an active participant; taking his destiny in his own hands. There is always a correlation between a person's character and his life turns out. One's approach to life is what matters a lot in the pursuit of destiny. How can one understand all of these?

Borrowing from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, (1958), the character Unoka was a lazy and improvident man, a debtor and a coward. He prefers drinking or playing on his flute, believing erroneously that he worked as hard as everyone else did; hence he was supposed to excel like others. This made him to go to the gods (perhaps to appease his *Chi* for better fortune) and to ascertain the cause of his failure in life. But the oracle screamed at him thus: *You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. You Unoka, is known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe. When your neighbours go out with their axes to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yamson exhausted farms that take no labour to clear. They cross sevenrivers to make their farms, you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man* (Achebe 1958: 13).

Had it been that Unoka worked hard, his destiny would have been that of success because, as the Igbo-Africans believe, when one says yes to life, his personal god also says yes. That is to say that if the hand is not soiled it cannot bring about a mouth that is smeared with oil. Man is free and God has given him the earth to work on and till, he will only fashion his destiny according to the way he has chosen to live his life and relate with nature and his community. Ekanola (2006) asserts that the Yoruba idea and concept of *Ajala* is mythological and metaphorical, as there is nothing like that which directs the affairs of man without his character and action in nature.

Nature is just; it can only reward one according to the free choice that has been made by such a person. As we indulge in our habits and characters, we are writing our biography, our history and choosing our destiny. Destiny is not entirely the function of any prenatal choice, but the accumulation of human efforts, approach to life, moral character and hard work. Even if man has been given a certain destiny at birth from the supernatural world, there is still the opportunity to change the course of such destiny by appeasing the oracle and making some rituals and sacrifices. In the case of Unoka, the solution to his problem was said to lie in his hands; he just needed to put more efforts into life so as to witness a turnaround in destiny. This also teaches us that in traditional African society, the solution for everything does not lie with the spirits and the gods; man has a great role to play in helping to make his life a meaningful and fulfill his destiny.

Makinde (2007) has also the Yoruba concept of *Ori* shows that destiny is not synonymous with fatalism. This is because fatalism in Yoruba thought is the belief in hopelessness and acceptance of it, while destiny implies the introduction of human efforts for the choice of good *ori*. Oluwole (1995) has described fatalism as an obnoxious theory that flouts all experience. It is a theory that all events are pre-determined by a deity or a supernatural force called fate (Oluwole 1995: 23). The choice of good *ori*, which is combined with human efforts will ultimately lead to good destiny. Makinde maintains that the interpretation of the Yoruba thought as strong destiny will bring about many contradictions. This is because, no matter the kind of *ori* chosen, human actions can still amend bad destinies through sacrifices propitiations (Oluwole 1995: 136). The relationship between *ori* and destiny is not an invariable one, it then means that not every good choice of *ori* leads to good destiny, neither does every bad choice of *ori* lead to bad destiny (Oluwole 1995: 134).

This is where human actions and responsibility comes in. no matter the kind of *ori* one chooses, it will always depend on his actions to shape his destiny positively or negatively. As Ekanola (2006) has opined, there is no *ori* which is different from human actions. After all, *Orunmila* knew that the individual has an impact on his personal destiny, the reason why he chose to remain indifferent to our choice of *ori* (Makinde 2007: 135).

2.3.3 Death and Reincarnation

Death is believed to be a part of destiny, as well as reincarnation. Every person must die because that is the ultimate destiny of man. Man was not created to live forever on the earth, but the African will always make every effort through consultations with the spirit world to avoid premature and sudden death. It is better to die when one is ripe enough; having lived a very long life on the earth. Oluwole (1995: 43) describes reincarnation as “the rebirth of a dead individual”. While details of such rebirth could vary from society to society, the basic tenet of the phenomenon of reincarnation is the belief that a dead person could be reborn to occupy a different physical body (Oluwole 1995). What other views on death can we understand?

Mbiti (1982: 149) avers that death stands between the visible world of man and the invisible world of the spirit. It is the journey of all persons and no one can cheat death. It is an individual affair in which nobody can interfere or intervene. Relatives watch their loved ones without being able to stop it. The destiny of death has long been accepted by Africans as a natural rhythm. The African believes that death has to do with the physical separation of the body from the spirit, it does not lead to annihilation. The grave is a point of separation between the living and the dead, but it nevertheless becomes a point of convergence when it becomes a shrine of an ancestor. Ibenwa, Okwor & Ukechusim (2014) insist that the land of the ancestors, which is a resting place for the dead is not a permanent place of rest unless one has completed his circle of reincarnations.

It is also true of the African traditional concept of destiny that man continues to come back until the full circle of death and reincarnation is completed. But the African believes also that the hereinafter is a continuation of this life. He does not subscribe to the Christian idea of this world being a temporal place (ibid). Reincarnation is a cyclic return of a dead person through a new born child (Mbiti 1977). Ekwunife (2000: 11) has defined reincarnation as the exercise of a mystic influence of the spirit on the body which neither diminishes the status of the dead in the spirit world, nor does it destroy or supplant the unique personality and individuality of the new born child. Thus, according to Ibenwa, et al (2014), the phenomenon of reincarnation should not be viewed from the

English translation, but from the cultural and religious context of the people. It is the fate of all persons, just like death. Do ancestors really have a role to play in this grand scheme of things?

The land of the ancestors can only be used for the purpose of waiting, but except those who have completed their circle of reincarnations, everybody will come back into the world. The Igbo view reincarnations as a return from the land of the spirit, where the ancestors live, to the world. And the existence of the two worlds, as they impinge on each other in a continuous interaction, for the African, is not a figment of imagination which modern scientific and technological education can snuff away completely (Ibenwa et al 2014: 35-36).

So, both death and reincarnation are part of the destiny of man in the concept. There is nobody who can cheat death, and everybody who has not completed his circle of reincarnation will come back to this world and live again as a human being. Achebe captures this succinctly: *Ezeudu! He called in his guttural voice. If you had been poor in your last life, I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been a coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young, I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long. So, I shall ask you to come again the way you came before* (Achebe 1958: 98).

That is the destiny of the traditional African, to be born, to die and to return back into the world to continue what he had left behind. That is why the African believes that life itself is cyclic. We keep going round the circle of life till we fulfill our complete circle of reincarnation to continue life in the great beyond.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ is believed to be a part of destiny (a) death (b) enjoyment (c) cruising (d) social media followership
2. The Yoruba calls this destiny _____

2.4 Summary

Despite the different views and controversies surrounding the concept of destiny and fate in African traditional system, it should be understood that the African take the idea of destiny and fate seriously. It is believed that God and the spirits had negotiated everyone's destiny with him at his birth, but it is also true that work and moral character goes a long way to shape and fashion one's destiny. Man, knowing that ill-fate and bad destiny spells doom for him in the world, will go to any length to make sure that

bad destiny is averted through the necessary sacrifices and rituals. Man also understands that laziness will ultimately bestow bad misfortune on him, so he tries as much as possible to work and till the earth for his economic prosperity. Death has been identified as an inevitable destiny of man, as well the phenomenon of reincarnation. Therefore, no matter what man does on the earth, he will always bear in mind that one day he will leave this physical realm of reality to transit to the great beyond. This unit has taught about the concept of destiny and fate in African philosophy. This means how Africans view the concepts and how they prepare themselves to embrace it as part of reality. Our character and disposition in life determine what our destiny will be and it is instructive that African philosophy begins to look towards this direction in order to reposition itself and become relevant in the contemporary world. No matter what one claims to have been given as destiny in the spirit world, everything ultimately boils down to work and character. A man with a bad character will inevitably suffer ill-fate and bad destiny; because nature only gives us what we put into it. We cannot sow bad behavior and expect to reap good destiny and fortunes. As we have said, people only attribute good fortunes to destiny when there is no empirical reason for such fortune. The idea of prenatal and preordained destiny is mythical and metaphorical as Ekanola (2006) has made us to understand. Hard work and good behavior are the only things capable of transforming our economic and spiritual lives. Africans should be able to emphasize the essence of those virtues, since man, the agent of such virtues, is the centerpiece of reality and creation. As can be observed from the foregoing, the concepts of destiny and freedom are conflated in the treatment of the topics in African Philosophy. Both cannot coexist. The belief in destiny cannot be consistently held with that of freedom. If one believes in destiny and still believes in the need to work hard and be strategic in one's ways, then that would not be what is usually understood as destiny. It is therefore, more appealing to say that there is no such thing as destiny, conceived as the fate of men, rigidly determined from the very beginning, that what we are calling destiny is, as Ekanola has observed, nothing but the accumulated consequences of our use of freewill. Thus conceived, we can then understand why destiny can change. For it is a product of freewill. If the will or choice changes, then the consequence (fate or destiny automatically changes).

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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | | |
|----|------------|
| 1. | (a); |
| 2. | <i>Ori</i> |

Unit 3 Moral Thinking in African Philosophy

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 The African Concept of Moral Values
 - 3.3.1 Foundations of Morality
 - 3.3.2 Momoh's Theory of Moralism
 - 3.3.3 Evaluation/Critique of Momoh's Moralism
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 3.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

3.1 Introduction

This unit will undertake a study of moral thinking and Moralism in African philosophy. This simply means how Africans see or conceive morality. Moral thinking in African philosophy basically has to do with maintaining healthy relationships between man and the invisible world, on the one hand and between man and his fellow members of the community, on the other. Central to this study will be Campbell Momoh's theory of moralism. Within the African metaphysical and holistic tradition, Momoh conceives his doctrine of moralism in the spirit of an African ethics. He maintains that the aspirational spirit of the whole and the community is that of moralism (Azenabor 2010). An ideology is part of one's image of the world, and moralism, according to Momoh, is an ideology. It is an ideology that places moral African philosophy at the center of everything the African does. It is a way of life that seeks to consider the welfare of others alongside one's self. The main doctrine of moralism is that every part and unit of the society has a duty to perform, and the guideline for performing that duty is the satisfaction of the legitimate, legal and, moral needs and wants of the other (Momoh 1999). This theory of African moralism propounded by C. S Momoh is geared towards making sure that personal responsibility is maintained in the society and man as a single unit of the African society takes the overall wellbeing of others seriously.

3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of morality in African philosophy
- describe C. S Momoh's theory of moralism
- explain the foundations of moral authority in African tradition
- discuss the role morality plays in African societies.

3.3 The African Concept of Moral Values

What is the concept of moral values among Africans? Morality in Africa, just like every other part of the world, deals with the issue of what is right and good and what is wrong and evil in human conduct. The moral sense of the African people has produced customs, rules, laws, traditions and taboos, which can be observed in every African society. African morals are embedded in these systems of behavior (Mbiti 1977: 175). Oluwole (1995) has contended that the Yoruba (African) hardly cares about the source of moral values, but is more interested in the sanctions. Her argument is that since there are as many gods in Africa as the number of families, it becomes illogical for one to claim that moral values are coming from the gods (Mbiti 1977: 67). The gods in Africa, according to her, are more interested in social sanctions than becoming sources of moral values (Mbiti 1977: 67). This is because, any moral values without sanctions is useless for societal cohesion. The authority of morality in many African societies is also believed to come from God Himself, and the ancestors are saddled with the responsibility of keeping watch over the people to make sure that they these moral values are kept and cherished. This is the religious dimension.

These same ancestors and spirits are to punish anyone who violates these moral values in the society (Mbiti 1977: 67). With this belief in punishment, as well as that of morality being decreed by the Supreme Being Himself, at least in the religious sense, the authority and strength of the moral codes and values becomes stronger. Mbiti (1977) has also argued that morality in African thought is divided into two; one being about the individual self, dealing with some personal decisions about his life, and the greater part being about the social cohesion and harmony of the community (Mbiti 1977). The African concept of morality puts emphasis on the issue of social conduct since the African believes that the individual is nothing without the social unit or the community. That is why the African believes that morality has been evolved not only to keep the individual alive but more importantly, to keep the society alive.

Sogolo (1993: 119) describes moral values as a conglomerate or set of institutional ideals cherished either by an individual or by a group of people. And subsumed under this set of ideals are, for example, material values, moral values, aesthetic values, religious values, etc. African moral values as Sogolo (1993) describes it could mean a set of institutionalized ideals which guide and direct the patterns of life of Africans. They are a set of descriptive goals which are desired and which all or most Africans have decided to subscribe to and which guides their lives and patterns of living. African moral values mean more than just moral values geographically located in Africa; they are moral values that are different, shared by a group of people. And because this group of

people is different, their moral values also ought to be different. But some philosophers have challenged the validity of traditional moral systems on the ground that most of the traditional moral value systems are not universalized, and second because of their alleged dogmatism and lack of reason (Sogolo 1993: 121). But the fact remains that Africa has her own moral values system which might not be entirely different from what is practiced in other parts of the world, but is more fitting and developed to align with the African environment and be able to tackle moral issues that are uniquely African. These moral codes are developed from the African perspective, in order to give the African a sense of order. They also produce the virtues of the African society, which we endeavour to preserve and protect.

J. S Mbiti (1977: 181) asserts that the African people understand that compliance with these moral behaviors could give man peace of mind. Once there is a breakdown in moral values, the whole society breaks down as well and such a society does not always end well. These moral values are shown in the African tradition through myths and legends; believing that as long as man follows them, he will live and enjoy the earth. At the family level, the man is said to be the head of the family and he has the responsibility of ensuring that the family moral values are passed on to his children diligently so as to ensure its preservation and continuation. When the family/clan moral values are not passed on accordingly to the next generation, such a generation becomes one without any sense of direction and purpose; wondering in the wilderness of ignorance. That is one major reason why the traditional African prays to have children who will succeed him in order to carry on the moral values of the family, and also pass them on to their own children, and so on. When a man dies, and looks over from the land of the spirits and sees that his family moral values are not being kept by the children he left behind, he is not happy about it, and it is believed that he will not be given his pride of place in the land of the dead. Therefore, Africans preserve and protect these moral values both for the benefit of an ordered society, and to keep their place in the land of the living-dead when they join their ancestors.

3.3.1 Foundations of Morality

We have noted that these moral values have their source in myths, legends and wise sayings of Africans. But Africans being cosmologically religious, religion also plays an important role in the formation of these moral values. That is to say that these wise sayings and religion are what form a part and parcel of the African moral system, and also part of African culture. Oluwole (1995) posits that the Yoruba (African) rarely cares about the source of moral values, but is interested in the reason behind moral sanctioning. The African does not believe that there is a

hell/purgatory where all moral sins will be sanctioned (Oluwole 1995: 67). The society does not attribute moral values to the gods, since there are many gods as there are families, and also, there is a freedom of worship in the traditional Yoruba society, Oluwole (1995) notes. What does this portend for the African basis of morality in the view of Oluwole?

In the view of Oluwole, it is impossible to make religion the source of morality since there are as many gods as there are families. We have earlier noted that the cultural moral and traditional system is deeply religious, to the extent that it is difficult to separate the two. Gbadegesin (1998) explores the basis of moral values in traditional African thought. He lays out the religious and logical perspectives of the divide concerning the foundation of moral values in the African worldview.

The religious school of thought has it that moral values are given by God; that it is a religious fruit as God made man and planted in him the seed of morality, the sense of right and wrong. They claim that African moral values are a priori, and therefore cannot have any other foundation but the religious one. This view is championed by Idowu (1962) who asserts that Africans do not separate religion from morality as the creator is responsible for the endowment of reason on the human being. This idea of religious foundation of morality is associated with the ancient traditional African thought that God as the creator has made everything; including laws of how man should live in the world. But Gbadegesin (1998: 302) has challenged this view by implying that when you say that religion is the foundation of a people's moral values, you are also saying at the same time that without religion they cannot act morally and in a responsible manner. It is true that virtually all traditional Africans have a sense of spirituality, and they think that religion or spirituality has an influence on moral values, but this does not mean that morality is founded on religion or that there could be no further ultimate source of moral values and ideals (Gbadegesin 1998).

Another view of morality is that it is essentially a social phenomenon. That society must keep itself alive and its machinery smooth-running, to this end; it evolves a system of self-preservation. This is the social school of thought about the foundation of moral values. The society cannot afford to self-destruct, that is why certain rules and regulations have been put in place to guide and guard against anarchy. This school of thought believes that conscience is nothing more than a complex of residual habits which society implants in man as if it brings him up and teaches him what to do (Gbadegesin 1998: 296). This implies that these societal codes of conduct which are meant to preserve the society are tools of moral control for members of the society. The individual agent will be controlled by the society, even without being mindful of it. Another

version of this non-religious basis of African moral values is the common-sense version. This version teaches that moral values are simply a product of common sense. That in order to live people must adapt themselves to their environment, and experience soon becomes the source of knowledge of right and wrong. This means that the more man lives in the society, the more he acquires the requisite experience on how to live among his fellows. If this experience is accumulated for a long time, the individual begins to appreciate what it means for something to be morally right and for something to be morally wrong. So given the reasoning ability man has, he can on his own, make moral choices and determine the ideas of moral rightness and wrongness (Gbadegesin 1998: 279). The fact that religion may influence some certain people and play a great role in their lives does not warrant the conclusion that religion is the foundation of moral values. To say that it is the foundation, or must be the foundation is another way of saying that without religion, the people cannot be morally responsible. One might claim that the community might invoke religion from time to time to support the taboos and other codes to maintain social order, but that is only what it is, support, and not the foundation of such moral values.

No matter the view one chooses to adopt in this raging debate, what matters to the African is the maintenance of moral and social order in our communities and villages. Today, Africa is challenged morally, economically, socially and politically. We are in need of morally sound individual citizens and leaders who will take responsibility and reposition the political landscape of Africa in order to bring about sustainable development. Corruption and misgovernance have become the bane of the continent. We therefore need people who will live by and maintain the age-long African moral values, no matter where they are believed to originate from. Endemic corruption has been a problem dragging the business of nation-building and development back in African, and with the right moral systems, this will be adequately tackled and brought to its barest minimum.

3.3.2 Momoh's Theory of Moralism

Azenabor (2010) analyses Momoh's idea of moralism extensively in his work *Modern Theories in African Philosophy*. Moralism according to Momoh has both an ideological and doctrinal perspective. He maintains that the doctrine of moralism is based on the theory of human nature. And as an ideology the doctrine of moralism claims to be a belief as well as a prescribed course of action (Azenarbo 2010: 136). Moralism as an ideology maintains that corruption and morality are antithetical, meaning that they cannot co-exist, because where one is present, the other has to be absent. Momoh states that moralism as an ideology is both systematic and comprehensive. It is applied in the system; in the offices,

in factories, and in homes. It can also apply in the political and economic realms of the society (Azenabor 2010: 136).

Momoh's ideology of moralism commits the individuals, groups, and the state itself to the system. This is the reason why moralism has the answers to the problem of corruption, a problem which, as Momoh claims, capitalism and socialism have not been able to cure, even though these ideologies have affected the course of world history (Azenarbo 2010). This is to a large extent the nature of the political system that Africa seriously needs to be able to curb the problem of endemic corruption which is bedeviling it. Momoh posits that all other systems are friendly to corruption, exploitation, slavery and oppression, and that that is the reason why Africa should adopt a system of moralism where corruption and other moral vices will be given a back bench. The West has fought two World Wars, involved in Apartheid, colonization, slavery and slave trade, injustice, irrationality, man's inhumanity to man. This shows massive immorality, and the two ideologies of capitalism and socialism they developed to tackle this vice have clearly not been able to do so (Momoh 1999: 104).

Given the level of corruption and misgovernance in Nigeria, Momoh believes that a country like Nigeria needs this doctrine of moralism. He maintains that it is an ideology which is applicable to economics, politics, and even capitalism and socialism. It is a comprehensive and adequate ideology which is able to cater for every aspect of life of a nation and for the African continent in general. The ideology of moralism can never be obsolete or outdated, like socialism and capitalism, Momoh claims. It is an eternal and timeless ideology for all classes of the society. It is, therefore, this kind of ideology that will stand the test of time and deal decisively with the problem of corruption in Nigeria and the rest of Africa. Moralism as a doctrine puts others before or alongside one's self. It maintains that honesty, service, and concern for the interest of others ought to be the basis and measure of all actions and policies in the society (Azenabor 2010: 137). The interest of the weak and the disadvantaged should take precedence over that of the strong or advantaged in any situation of life where there are many interests to consider. The strong and vulnerable in the society should be looked after; like the physically challenged, the poor, the children, women, and so on. Nobody should seek to take advantage of their situation in whatever manner. What social implication does this doctrine of morality possess?

This doctrine of moralism could help to put our rulers in the society in check. If they should understand that the interest of the people comes first, they will not need to siphon public funds in the name of governance. They will not be corrupt and they will perform their duties in accordance with the rules of the system. Let us remember that this doctrine of moralism

teaches that the interest of the greater number should take precedence to personal and parochial political interests. Momoh advocates that for this doctrine of moralism to be enforceable, the following measures have to be taken:

- The institution of an ethical arm of government to oversee the activities of major government functionaries; and
- The establishment of an active oath taking.

He maintains the current type of oath taking in Africa is a passive one. We need an active oath taking. That type of oath taking should be evolved to include what should befall the oath taker if he willfully and deliberately enriches himself to the detriment of the masses. And the oath should be invoked in the name of the indigenous gods or spirits or juju. It does not matter if the swearer of the oath believes in juju or not, but everyone who is to swear should be prepared adequately for that purpose. The efficacy of juju does not depend on belief. It is real (Momoh, 1999, P132). He asserts that a social problem can only be fought only by using means and methods which members of the society believe to be real. That is why juju will be a successful weapon against corruption, since most Africans believe that the power of juju is real. This active oath taking will always keep the public office holder on his toes, knowing that there is that invisible mystical power watching him. Again, it will engender faith in the system.

3.3.3 Evaluation/Critique of Momoh

Momoh's doctrine of moralism is formulated against the backdrop that corruption in African societies is assuming an alarming rate. Nigeria is said to be the country with a dirty record, with unmitigated incidents of bribery, forgery, counterfeiting. Inflated contracts, dishonesty, nepotism, leakage of examination questions, unbridled sexual promiscuity, embezzlement, and a host of other social anomalies (Azenabor 2010: 143). The problem of corruption is of philosophical concern because corruption touches on morality which is ethical, and ethics happens to be a branch of philosophy. Secondly, corruption is of philosophical concern also because the agent concerned in corruption is man, and the analysis of the nature of man and the society is the job of philosophy (Azenabor 2010: 143). Some of the revered ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle were also anti-corruption crusaders. Corruption is simply an act done to give one an undue advantage, which is inconsistent with one's duty and the rights of others. So, corruption always has to do with a violation, an abuse of the social order, norms, rules and rights. Since all human actions are propelled by desires, corruption also is a product of human desire. We have our primary and secondary desires, as Bertrand Russell says. Our primary desires

include food, shelter, and clothing; while our secondary desire is the desire to acquire more than the primary desires; the primitive accumulation of wealth, and when this secondary desire is not met, many men are ready and willing to do anything, including violence, in order to secure them.

Momoh's moralism is reducible to the Golden Rule, but despite that, there are still some points of divergence. Though both principles attempt to regulate human behavior and relationship, Momoh's moralism is more of an ideology, according to (Azenabor 2010). He, Azenabor, insists that this moralism upholds dogma with some moral undertones, whereas the Golden Rule is not an ideology. Rather, the Golden Rule upholds freewill, which is the fundamental basis of morality. Azenabor (2010) also contends that Momoh's moralism is not exactly the same thing as morality. This is because moralism is the denial that there are other categories of value beside morality. It does not acknowledge other aspects of value systems apart from morality itself. Azenabor alleges that moralism propounds a slave morality. This form of morality is described as that which only brings out the qualities which alleviate the existence of sufferers. Qualities like sympathy, kindness, warm heart, humility, and friendliness; qualities which, according to Nietzsche, are coming from weakness, decadence and fear. These are slave morality which Nietzsche advised be thrown overboard because they are retrogressive and negative (Azenarbo 2010: 146). The slave morality is a resentment of the slave against the master, and prevents outstanding men from growth. They will always live in the pity of their master, thereby not doing any outstanding thing to gatecrash the master category. It must be pointed out that whether or not the above criticisms against moralism holds water is highly debatable, as they appear to be mere allegations, without adequate grounding. This includes the claim on the difference between moralism and morality or the golden rule.

Momoh's suggestion of the establishment of an ethical arm of government has been subjected to critical analysis, and it has been observed that the creation of such an arm of government will put too much powers on the arm, and secondly, it is doubtful if the ordinary setting up of an ethical arm of government will do, since the challenge is squarely a moral one, which will need individual decisions to remedy. We have the conventional police which has been given that responsibility of enforcing the laws of the land, but since the police is presently struggling to do that, one wonders what ethical police will achieve in that direction. What we need most in African is a proper moral and spiritual education for all societies. Momoh describes his suggestion of active oath taking as radical and revolutionary, based on the beliefs and culture of Africans. But critics could describe such a suggestion as primitive and retrogressive. That suggestion could take away fifty years of African

civilization and quest to join the modern world. If such a method is utilized, it will still lose its efficacy and value in no time. This is because given the Nigerian factor, an antidote will soon be found to neutralize whatever powers in the juju. The juju men, who will always be party to the original preparation of the charm, might likely be buyable, and by that, the whole system will be corrupted once again. Therefore, what really matters is the choice of the individual member of the society to be moral and not some form of forceful juju oath swearing.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. The African world is ultimately a _____ one and that is why it is believed that the moral values are founded on religion.
2. Momoh's moralism is reducible to the Golden Rule, but despite that, there are still some points of divergence (a) True (b) False (c) Undetermined (d) None of these

3.4 Summary

Morality is dependent on the individual person. No matter the level of religious persuasion, people who have made the decision to act right will always do so, and people who have not made such decisions will continue to act wrongly until such a time that they will understand the essence of doing good. As Plato said, man can only be immoral and do evil because of ignorance. It is ignorance that makes people to do the wrong thing. Nobody will willfully commit evil if such a person understands the repercussions of doing so. People indulge in bad habits because they have not really been educated enough on the negative effects of such habits. The importance of moral education in Africa can, therefore, not be overemphasized. When people get the right moral education, they will begin to put these moral rules into practice and our society will be better for it. The African world is ultimately a religious one and that is why it is believed that the moral values are founded on religion. But some people still believe that reason and common sense play a big role in fashioning and in the evolution of moral values. Man is the agent involved and man has reason and common sense. These moral codes will only apply when man deploys his rational faculties appropriately. God has given man rationality and reason, but it now depends on man to deploy these attributes accordingly, in order to keep order in the society. The society does not want to self-destruct, that is why it has evolved these moral values to put things in check and to regulate relationships between individuals and the society. No society survives on anarchy, so every society will make sure that peace and harmony reign, and that man's excesses are tamed to the barest minimum with these values. In the final analysis, morality and moralism imply doing the right thing and avoiding

the wrong thing. African societies will be better off with a well-structured and organized system that will usher in the much needed moral society.

3.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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3.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

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|----|------------|
| 1. | Religious; |
| 2. | (a) |

Unit 4 The African Traditional Religion

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 Nature of African Religion
 - 4.3.1 Structure of African Religion
 - 4.3.2 Challenges of African Religion
 - 4.3.3 Values of Religion
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

4.1 Introduction

This unit introduces us to the African traditional religion. The African religion is said to be the source of cosmology and ontology in African societies. The African's relationship with supernatural being brings about two different responses; he may seek to control the supernatural being or adopt the attitude of submission. The African believes that the universe was created by a Supreme Being who is called God, and he also believes that this God is worthy of worship and submission. The African religion comprises of institutionalized system of symbols, beliefs, values and practices focused on questions of ultimate meaning and reality. It is a religion believed have been handed down by the ancestors who lived a long time ago before this generation. The main medium of transfer and preservation of this religion is oral tradition; proverbs, myths, wise sayings, songs, and so on. The African world is ultimately explained religiously and every African, no matter his immediate culture and society, believes in one the spiritual beings and gods. The African religion could properly designate as the search and quest for ultimate cause of things, the Supreme maker of the universe. This Supreme maker of the universe who is said to be God, has stipulated some basic and fundamental laws in nature about individual and group relationships and conduct.

Traditional beliefs, history, culture and the environment have had tremendous influence on the African religion, as well as accumulated experiences in the universe. The African religions are not also some sets of dogmas, every person just have to assimilate whatever religious ideas and practices that are held in his family and community (Metuh 1978: 19). In the African religion, there are gods, goddesses and other spirit beings which are regarded as intermediaries to the Supreme Being. Africans consult and pour libations for these intermediaries to be able to reach the Supreme who is believed to be over and above the rest of the lesser

gods and spirit beings. In studying this religion, we shall explore the nature, values and challenges of it. The religion as we understand is embedded deep into the African culture; as it is very difficult for one to differentiate one from the other. That is why some scholars believe that African religion is the culture, tradition and customs of the African peoples. What is known as African tradition and customs can also be called African religion. We should note that some Africans who are practicing Christians still value and maintain these customs and traditions in their day to day lives.

4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning and sources of African religion
- examine the challenges of African religion
- discuss the structure of African religion
- explain the values of African religion.

4.3 The Nature of African Religion

What is the nature of African religion? How does it differ from other forms of religious practices? Mbiti (1977: 10) observes that religion can be defined in five different dimensions and parts, as no one aspect has the entire meaning of religion in it. He explained religion in form of:

- Beliefs, this is that which show the way people think about the universe and their attitude towards life itself. African religion is concerned with beliefs such as God, spirits, human life, magic, the hereafter, and so on.
- Practices, ceremonies and festivals, these are also very important in any religion. They show how people express their beliefs in practical terms, and they involve praying, making of sacrifices, rituals, observing various customs, and so on. There are festivals to mark harvest time, planting time and so on as we have earlier noted.
- Religious objects and places, these are the things the people have set apart as holy in the religion. These things and places are not commonly used except for special worship occasions. Some of these things are made by man while others are taken in their natural form.
- Values and morals, these also form part and parcel of any religion including the African religion. These are the norms that guide the

relationship between individuals and communities. They cover topics such as truth, justice, decency, love, respect, keeping of promises, and so on. These values help to maintain order in the society and harmony in the society.

- Religious leaders, they are the people who conduct religious matters such as ceremonies, sacrifices, formal prayers, and divinations. These people have better knowledge of religious matters and they act as priests, diviners and priestesses. They are well respected within the community as without them religious activities will not function properly. They act as the human keepers of religious heritage. They form an essential part of African religion since the religion will not function without them.

These are the major components every religion, and the African religion also has them. They are what contribute to make up any religion and we cannot define religion by only one or two of these components, they have to be considered together to form a genuine definition of religion.

African religion is the product of thinking by the African forefathers who formulated religious ideas, beliefs, and ceremonies by observing their natural environment and surroundings. By so doing, they evolved laws which safeguarded the life of the individual and the community. These laws and traditions are what combine to make up what is known as the African religion. Religion for Africans, has been the normal way of looking at life and observing the universe through the ages. It is part of the African heritage, and as we have said in the previous units, no traditional African is entirely without a religion, that is, if religion is said to be the relationship between man and the invisible world of the spirits. The African believes in the spirit, and also acknowledges that the spirit world and the physical world work together as part of an indivisible reality. Mbiti (1977) notes that Africans who live according to their traditional values are said to be religious. Therefore, African tradition is a tradition with religious undertone; one cannot actually separate the two. Metuh (1987: p1) has also noted that the African religion is ethnic religion. They are folk religion which has grown out of the experiences and practices of the people who live in small scale societies, so their tenets are tailored to suit their unique needs. That is to say that the African religion was evolved to see to the particular social, political and environmental needs of the African peoples. African peoples for a long time understood that a religion should be able to solve real time unique challenges of the people. The African religion does not have a systematic writing through which the tenets of the religion is spread, but this does not limit the influence of the environment, history, culture, and accumulated experiences of the people over the years (ibid). The main medium of spreading and passing this religion from one generation to the other is oral tradition.

4.3.1 Structure of African Religion

By structure of the African religion, we mean the hierarchy of beings in the religion. The African has structured his religion and God, the Supreme Being at the highest of it, followed by the ancestors who are departed members of the community overlooking the affairs of the community from the land of the living-dead, we have priests and priestesses who carry out the religion as its professionals, and lastly, we have the ordinary man in the community who relates with the spirit world through these priests and priestesses. Parrinder (1975) explains that the supernatural powers in the African religion are believed to be in hierarchies. There is no wild confusion of forces and explanation is given why some powers are believed to be more potent than others. The highest in this structure of beings and forces is the Supreme Being- God who is believed by the African to have created everything in the universe and made man the centerpiece of that creation. He is often considered to be remote that men do not pray to him regularly, but in time of great distress, Africans turn to God directly. Ancestors and other spirit beings are intermediaries between man and the Supreme Being, sacrifices and offerings might be made to them which should be passed on to the source of all, which is God. God is experienced as an all-pervading reality. He is the constant participant in the affairs of human beings. About Him, Africans confess to know little or nothing (Edet 2009). The African believes that God, since He cannot be approached directly in most cases, should be approached through intermediaries like the ancestors and spirit beings. Mbiti (1977) contends that the African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. In the African traditional life, there are no atheists.

As we have stated, second on the structure are the ancestors and other spirit beings that are believed to be closer to God than the rest of us. The ancestors are the living-dead who once co-existed with the rest of us, but later died a natural death at old age in order to keep watch over the community from the land of the living-dead. That is why Africans usually describe death as joining one's ancestors. It is believed that these ancestors are still alive, ordinary humans cannot be able to see them. They are the ones who pass the request of the community to God and also look over from the land of the living-dead to make sure that the moral values of the community are kept by all and sundry. Anyone who violates any of these moral codes could be punished by the ancestors, even with death. Another stage of the structure of the African religion is the stage of the diviners, priests and priestesses. These are the people that communicate and commune with the spirit world in order to find solutions to the challenges of the individual and the community (Edet 2009). They are the ones that, after due consultations, will specify

the form of sacrifices and appeasements to be offered to the gods and spirits. Individuals consult them for individual problems, while the community consults them as a whole for any problem that affects the whole community. The ordinary is at the last stage of the structure of the African religion. But he is also arguably the most important because without him, the religion will not have worshippers and adherents. He worships the Supreme Being through the ancestors, gods and spirit being because he believes that the Supreme Being cannot be often reached directly by an ordinary mortal. He pours libations, sacrifices and offering in order to appease and pleads whenever he has violated any of the moral values of the community, in order to avoid punishment.

4.3.2 Challenges of African Traditional Religion

The African also has its own challenges which it has grappled with for a very long time. The earlier interpretation of the religion by the Europeans who came to African did not help matters about the perception of the religion. They described the religion in derogatory terms like animism, primitive culture, fetishism, heathenism and so on. This is a challenge of derogation that the African religion is still contending with till this day (Mbiti 1982). This wrong characterization of the African religion by Western colonialists and scholars put a dent on the integrity of the religion. This was also a ploy by the West to make Africans abandon their own traditional religion and accept Christianity. Christianity is another challenge that confronts the religion. This is because Christian preachers have continued to derogate the religion of the Africans by demonizing it and associating with evil. This is not to say that, just like every other religion. African religion does have areas to improve, but the onslaught against the religion and way of life of the Africans by some Christian preachers and adherents is quite unwarranted. Another source of challenge for the African religion is the fact that there is no written holy book for its adherents to consult, just like other religions. This has made it difficult to find any form of uniformity in the religion, as different peoples in African practice it the way they deem fit. Some scholars have also observed that the lack of written scripture is a unique distinguishing feature of the African religion, and should not be regarded as a challenge in any way.

The African religion also has a problem of lack of common language of practice. We have so many languages in the African communities and local societies, so each community practices it with its own local language. This means that if another African visits a different community, he may not be able to practice the religion comfortably because the language and ways of practice will be different from what he is used to in his own community. This is why Mbiti has argued that there is nothing like African religion, but we have African traditional

religions; meaning that each local community in African has a particular and unique way of practicing the religion, which of course differs from the next community. That also brings us to the problem of lack of centralized leadership. The African religion, due its communal nature, has no centralized leadership like Christianity and Islam. This means that decision making is left to the autonomous communities and individuals to make; after consulting with their priests and diviners.

4.3.3 Values of Religion

Does religion possess any instrumental end and value? Values are important because they are regarded as belonging to a higher level. They cannot be replaced easily, just as they are not negotiable (Cipriani, 2017). Mbiti (1977) analyses the different values of religion to mankind. And the African traditional religion also plays these roles in the African communities. Religion is a very aspect of the human existence and it helps man psychologically, spiritually, socially and economically. There is nothing the traditional African does that does not have a religious meaning, because the African believes that the world is a religious one. The traditional African religion is responsible for cultivating the whole person of the African (Mbiti 1977: 198). The following are some the values of religion according to Mbiti (1977):

- It is the duty of religion to provide people with a view of the world in that it helps the African to understand the world in which he lives. Some questions which arise from the experiences of the world are answered by religion, and the African has found these answers practicable and meaningful in his life. Religion gives people a way of understanding the world and their own existence. Some of these questions are questions nothing else can answer, but the fact that the people are obliged to believe their religion, they believe also in the answers even though they might not be satisfactory;
- The African religion provides us with moral values of the world. Since man has both physical and spiritual components, it is religion that nourishes his spiritual component. Religion helps to provide spiritual insights by form of prayers, rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, devotions and so on. The African religion, as we have seen, has many rituals which are channels for the contact between men and the spirit world;
- Religion is also said to have inspired great ideas (Mbiti 1977: 200) concerning the moral life- courage, love, endurance, helpfulness, sense of kinship and so on. It has also helped us in the area of cultural achievements like arts, dancing, music, carving and

architecture. It has helped to keep marriages, political systems, kinship, and so on;

- It is also a means of communication in terms of social communication and the communication between man and God. In terms of social communication, people interact together and perform rituals together; they also meet indirectly through having common myths, legends, values, traditions, morals, and worldviews. In the aspect of communication with God, religion helps to turn our lives towards God so that we can communicate with Him. This is because, African peoples believe in spirit beings and the invisible powers of nature as an essential dimension of the African religion;
- Religion also helps to make people understand their limitations in that it tells them that they are created and have limited powers and control over the universe. This is what drives them to trust in God through rituals, ceremonies, and divinations. It makes people to be humble, and to understand that the universe has a maker who is all-powerful; and
- The African religion also celebrates life. We have seen different forms of ritual in the African traditional religion meant to celebrate life and the joy of living. African religion does not promise people a better life after this. People have passed did not go to a better place or a worse place, but it teaches us to celebrate the joy of being alive.

4.4 Summary

The African traditional religion is a part and parcel of the African worldview. And as we have said, the African does not do anything without his religion, and although most Africans now subscribe to either Christianity or Islam, an African does not entirely abandon his religion. So, this religion is an essential part of the African traditional thought and philosophy. It is embedded in the cultural practices of the people and gives the people some sense of the sacred and community. There have been many detractors of this religion; especially the Western influence of Christianity and colonialism. But the despite the many challenges that confront it in the contemporary times, it is imperative to note that with slight changes, the African religion will continue to wax strong because it is part of the life of the average African. This unit has treated the African traditional religion which is an aspect of the African philosophy. One cannot talk about African philosophy without talking about the religion of the Africans, since religion forms a nucleus of the worldview and reality of the African peoples. As Parrinder (1976) has opined, we find

mixed form of religious belief in Africa; dynamism, spiritism, and theism. The spirit powers are ranked hierarchically and approached based on needs. Magical powers are meant for teething troubles, the ancestors are consulted over land disputes and other related matter, while above all these is God the creator. All these powers are essential because they help in his fight against disease, drought or witchcraft. Religion is not just for a special class, though there are specialists in ritual; it is not for those who feel piously inclined, though there are divergent temperaments. But religion is part and parcel of the life of all Africans as certain transitional rites have to be passed in order to gain access into the more spiritual classes. Religion provides the moral and legal values which the society cannot provide on its own by secular sanctions.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. Mbiti identifies _____ numbers of values of religion (a) 1 (b) 2 (c) 4 (d) 5
2. The African religion has a problem of lack of common language of practice (a) Certainly true (b) Certainly false (c) Possibly true (d) Possibly false

4.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

1. (d);
2. (a)

End of Module Questions

1. The African world is ultimately a _____ one and that is why it is believed that the moral values are founded on religion
2. Momoh's _____ is reducible to the Golden Rule, but despite that, there are still some points of divergence
3. The African religion has no problem of lack of common language of practice (a) Certainly true (b) Certainly false (c) Possibly true (d) Possibly false
4. Momoh's moralism is not reducible to the Golden Rule, but despite that, there are still some points of divergence (a) True (b) False (c) Undetermined (d) None of these

MODULE 4 SOME SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT/ CONCEPTS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Unit 1	Contemporary Schools of Thought in African Philosophy
Unit 2	The Theory of African Humanism
Unit 3	African Political Theories
Unit 4	African Traditional Thought and Western Thought

Unit 1 Contemporary Schools of Thought in African Philosophy

Unit Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 Contemporary African Philosophy
 - 1.3.1 School of Logical Positivism/Analytic Philosophy
 - 1.3.2 The Scholastic School
 - 1.3.3 Philosophical Materialist School
 - 1.3.4 The Conversationalist School
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

1.1 Introduction

The schools of thought in contemporary African philosophy represent the principles and logical character, as well as the individuals who played important roles in formulating the various systems and viewpoints. Members of a particular school are recognized based on their interest in a particular philosophic tradition or the other. It is also based on the defence and common view shared by such figures and philosophers. The contemporary African philosophy was born after colonialism and the subsequent fight for liberation by different African philosophers and political leaders. This also has to do with the great intellectual movement which came with the adoption of philosophy as a formal course of study in African institutions of higher learning (Nwala 2010: 119). Resulting from that, many schools of thought in African Philosophy were born. These schools of thought mirror the Western pattern of schools of thought in philosophy, but the difference is that this time around, they are promulgated by philosophers and scholars of African origin who sought to use these ideas to champion the liberation of the continent and also compete with what is obtainable in Western philosophy.

1.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning of contemporary African philosophy
- identify the important figures in contemporary African philosophy
- discuss the different schools of thought in African philosophy.

1.3 Contemporary African Philosophy

Contemporary African philosophers attempt to re-think the challenges that confronted their pioneer counterparts. While the pioneer African philosophers discussed and argued on issues bothering on meta-philosophy, their successors in the contemporary stage, in a bid to give a novel response to the same issues, ended up introducing innovative frameworks and entirely fresh perspectives, new themes and solutions. Contemporary African philosophy, having started from the days of Tempels' *La Philosophie Bantou*, has made tremendous progress, having the issue of African identity always featuring as a prominent theme (Asiegbu 2016). The problem of African identity has always been a basis of the discussion in contemporary African philosophy. Indeed, one might argue that there is no other issue in contemporary African philosophy apart from the issue of identity. This issue of identity was sparked by the desire of Africans to defend both their skin colours and their ability to reason cognitively, as well as Africa's contribution to the development and civilization of the world. That was largely the quest to overcome Western hegemony by African scholars during and immediately after colonialism. The world over, whether it be Chinese, Indian, or American contemporary philosophy, the issue has always been that of identity (Asiegbu 2016). It was not only about liberating Africa from the clutches of the West, but it was also about the issue of identity. Freedom and the quest to defend their identity as Africans was what led to the birth of what is now known as contemporary African philosophy.

Makumba (2007: 94) describes contemporary African philosophy as the period from around the second half of the 19th century to this day. The contribution of the 20th century to African philosophy was a monumental one as contemporary African philosophy, with the establishment of philosophy as a course of study in the institutions of higher learning in Africa and the rest of the world, has spread across the continent of Africa and even beyond. Contemporary African philosophy is putting African philosophy on the map of formal and scientific philosophical research in the world (Makumba 2007). Though contemporary African philosophy took off on a defensive note, to

defend the continent, and black people in general, against cultural, scientific and historical degradation of their integrity by the West, coupled with colonial oppression and exploitation. But these have been overcome and contemporary African philosophy has now moved on to other concerns: that of strict philosophical research which treats all the central themes of philosophy (Makumba 2007: 95). Another area which contemporary African thought is concerned with, as it is, is the development and economic emancipation of the continent of Africa. Poverty, illiteracy, diseases, famine, and so on, are still very present at an alarming level in Africa. So, African philosophy should also begin to device ways of tackling these vices. Makumba (2007) observes that true development and emancipation need to be built on a solid foundation, and philosophy has the task of providing such solid foundation.

Nwala (2010: 119) observes that contemporary philosophy is largely not distinct from the social philosophies formulated by great social thinkers and leaders of the African liberation movement. According to him, it includes the contemporary social thought in Africa such as the philosophy postulated by Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Azikiwe, Awolowo, etc. The Great Debate about African philosophy was about the existence, scope, and nature of African philosophy. Contemporary African philosophy has not been limited within the boundaries of the continent alone; it has also gone far and wide all over the world, carried along by both scholars and philosophers of African heritage, as well as those that are not of African origin. By and large, it is worth reiterating that the essence and value of contemporary African thought was that of emancipation and liberation, as well as the establishment of African thought and civilisation as an important contributor in world civilization and development. But today, professional philosophers in contemporary Africa have a lot of work to do in the area of proffering workable solutions to the challenges confronting the continent.

Abanuka (2013: 119) asserts that the skepticism concerning the existence of African philosophy marked a stage in the progress of African reflective consciousness, as the authentic African mind cannot afford to doubt the existence of African philosophy. It is the non-African, Abanuka (2013) contends, that will have doubts about African philosophy because he does not understand African culture and civilisation.

1.3.1 School of Logical Positivism/Analytic philosophy

This group is the group that flatly rejects the concept of ethno-philosophy. Nwala (2010: 125) argues that most of the philosophers in this school are largely Western trained and influenced by the logical

positivism of the Vienna Circle and British empiricist movement. This school of thought believes that epistemology and logic are the only keys to philosophy. They share a common perception with the post-modern which argues that science should be the only method and standard used in measuring philosophy. Nwala (2010: 125) continues: “while some emphasize conceptual analysis and clarification of meaning as the central concern of philosophy, others emphasise reliance on the findings of the experimental sciences for the derivation of the fundamental concepts and properties of philosophy.”

Niekerk (2015) asserts that the analytic style focuses on testing the coherence, validity and truth of specific propositional claims. Analytic philosophy also has to do with formulating and reformulating propositions in ordinary language such that the meaning will be broken down as much as possible. Nwala mentions the likes of Robin Horton, Kwasi Wiredu, Henry Odera Oruka, Peter Bodunrin, John Sodipo, E. A. Ruch, Gene Blocker, and so on as members of this school of thought in African philosophy.

This school of thought disagrees with the claim that anything that does not relate to the analytic tradition of Western philosophy does not qualify as philosophy. The analytic tradition of African philosophy is interested in three related assumptions (Kayange 2018: 6):

- That philosophical problems are a consequence of the misuse or misunderstanding of the meaning of language;
- That philosophy is the logic of meaning and truth; and
- That meaning is determined by the use of language

They insist that the misuse of language and meaning will cause us to draw false inferences. Analytic philosophy places emphasis and importance on the concept of analysis, or better still, logical analysis. It is generally about breaking something into smaller parts so that it becomes intelligible. In the 19th century, positivism became an empiricist interpretation and systematization of sciences, which was combined with the general theory of history of the society as a theoretical articulation of the definite set of political problems. Positivist African philosophers believe that African philosophy is supposed to align with the methods of science, empiricism and the knowledge of the senses. In the final analysis, we should note that the major belief of the positivists is that the rules of the experimental sciences should govern philosophy.

1.3.2 The Scholastic School

This school in contemporary African philosophy was instituted by the clergy. The first books on traditional African philosophy were written by clergies like Placide Tempels, John Mbiti, Abe Kagame, and so on. These people set the stage for the practice of scholasticism in African philosophy. The main feature of scholasticism is the belief that religious concepts and principles are the basis of traditional mode of thought (Nwala 2010: 126). They agree that Western thought is scientific, while also insisting that African thought is religious. They also teach that the traditional African mode and the Western scientific mode are concerned with two different domains of reality, the non-empirical and the empirical. Nwala (2010) agrees that there is continuity between the traditional categories of thought and the scientific categories. He believes that one stage can transform to another stage. This school of thought also emphasizes a particular function and character of philosophy, i.e., the assumption that there is only one way of arriving at the truth philosophically. The truth which philosophy seeks is related to the ultimate truth, and the good which philosophy seeks is not the practical good of this life, but the ultimate good which lies beyond this life.

The Good, according to scholastics is God. So the meaning and mission of philosophy is the search for God and its moral and spiritual function is said to be more important to the scholastics than its technical, theoretical, or materialist functions (Nwala 2010). This is saying that the scholastic school of African philosophy borrows its ideas from the Thomist philosophy of the West in insisting that philosophy's main goal is the search for the ultimate Good. That the moral and spiritual functions of philosophy are more desirable than its intellectual and material essence. Scholastic philosophy reduces every philosophical theory to religion and theology. They assume that we cannot do philosophy, or traditional philosophy without the religious and theological undertone. This school of thought in African philosophy places religion and the belief in God at the centre of the philosophical enterprise in Africa. Scholastic philosophy had its origin in the foundation of Carolingian schools, an event which was the beginning of the intellectual renaissance of Europe (Turner 1903: 417). It was the philosophy of the schools which resulted from the attempt to dispel the intellectual darkness of the European age of barbarism, and throughout the course of its development, it bore the mark of its origin. They fought to banish mysticism and adopt reason. They were the schoolmen who sought to unify philosophy and theology, to discover and demonstrate the relationship between natural truth and the truth of supernatural order.

They attach independent value to philosophy and theology, while also conceding that philosophy and theology can never contradict. The doctrine of continuity and independence of the natural with respect to the supernatural order of truth is the core of the doctrine of scholasticism (Turner 1903). This is the thought which inspired the first speculative attempts of the schoolmen, and which, after having manifested itself in so widely different forms in the philosophy of Erigena, of Abelard, and of St. Anselm, was finally crystallized in the principles in which St. Thomas enunciated his definition of the relations between reason and faith. The day has long gone by when a historian could, without fear of contradiction and protest, represent Scholastic philosophy as the subjugation of reason to authority. It is now universally conceded that the phrase *ancilla theologize* implied no servility on the part of philosophy (Turner 1903), but rather the honorable service of carrying the torch by which the path of theology is lighted. One has but to look at the vast number of volumes which the schoolmen wrote to realize how much value they attached to philosophy and how inexorably they felt the need of exercising their reason.

1.3.3 The Philosophical Materialist School

This school affirms the necessity of analysis and the scientific basis of philosophical propositions. It believes that both thought and nature have dialectic characteristics, and also emphasizes the social basis of consciousness (Nwala 2010: 130). To them, the categories of thought have both historical and generic characters. While they recognize the speculative dimension of philosophy, they believe that by and large, this speculative thought must bow to the scientifically established principles and theories (Nwala 2010).

Philosophy, like any other intellectual activity, must be able to serve the fundamental needs of humanity. This is because, philosophy is not all about formal activities alone, the truth of philosophical activities must be by practice in real life. They conceive philosophy as an agent of change and goes try to establish a link between philosophy and ideology. This is to say that, to the materialist school of African philosophy and even the materialist school all over the world, philosophy should serve as an agent of change, a special intellectual engagement that will translate to improving the welfare of human beings. It should not only limit itself to the walls of universities and institutions of higher learning. It is not all about rationalism, but about the material needs of the people and the physical emancipation of the human race. The materialist philosophy has been a source of social development in contemporary Africa. The socio-philosophical thought of this school brings to the fore the need for philosophy to become relevant to people and lead to material and economic change (progress) in the world.

They criticise what they understand to be the apparent abstract nature of analytic philosophy as they believe that it makes philosophy a disinterested activity, which is only involved with abstract reality. The contemporary materialist African philosophers draw inspiration from Karl Marx, because Marxism was the most plausible perspective for interpreting a 20th century world which was shaped and dominated by colonialism and neo-colonialism (Nwala 2010: 123). In this regard, Nwala cites Okolo (1990: 130) as follows: Karl Marx made use of philosophy, not just to interpret the world, but more importantly to change it, a pointer the clear conception of the social and practical function of philosophy. This conception is equally reminiscent of Mao's constant call to liberate philosophy from the confines of the philosophers' lecture rooms and text books and to turn it into a sharp weapon of struggle in the hands of the masses.

This is to say that the materialist school of contemporary African philosophy is interested in the idea of social change. It also implies that philosophy should not be confined to the class rooms and libraries alone, but should be used materially to effect social change. They believe that philosophy, especially African philosophy, should be a tool for social change, and the emancipation of the African peoples from the clutches of colonialism and neo-colonialism. It was a philosophy for mass action, for the people to awake and take their destiny in their own hands. To them, if philosophy cannot be used as vehicle for social change, then philosophy could be said to be useless to the ordinary man on the streets of Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Sudan, and so many African countries where the people are struggling to feel any form of impact of leadership in a positive way.

Enhancing social change should be the job of philosophy, and philosophers in Africa should begin to look towards that direction in their day- to- day involvement in the enterprise of philosophy. This philosophy of change should also be constructed with respect to the social realities of Africa and the Third World. Kwame Nkrumah was able to construct a philosophy of change in his *Consciencism* and mapped out the stages and theories to be adopted by Africa in order to enact this social change. Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* was also a philosophy built on the idea of material social change, which encourages the people not be passive observers of the activities happening in their land, but to actively participate in the affairs of their society. Fanon goes on to assert that the problem is to know the place the leaders give their people, and the kind of social relations that they decide to set up as well as the conception that they have of the future of humanity (Fanon 1980, p189). This is a clear- cut expression that the social condition of the people should be the jurisdiction of philosophy. The main challenge to contemporary African philosophers today is how to explore this aspect of the potential of philosophy and turn it into a

veritable tool for the economic, political, social and material wellbeing of humanity, and of Africans in particular.

1.3.4 The Conversationalist School

This school of thought in African philosophy emphasises relationship, interface, mutual interdependence and dialogue between African cultures in order to conceptualise a more sophisticated thought system in Africa (Chimakonam, 2017). This school of thought posits that philosophizing in Africa will be more robust and thought provoking if the different cultures could come together in dialogue, in order to present a template for the evolution and reconstruction of ideas that pre-dominate African philosophy. It is about the revision of positions and opening of new vistas for thought (Chimakonam, 2017).

This school of thought prioritises the sustenance of conversations and engagements over outcome, because it is about argumentation, but about shuffling of thoughts to benefit the African society. It can occur both at the level of individuals and between cultures, worldviews and traditions. The school of Conversationism is related to the Socratic method of dialectics; where questions are used as tool to investigate and reach logical truths. Chimakonam has also argued elsewhere that Conversationist African philosophy streamlines the minimum requirement, mode, focus and direction of thinking in contemporary African philosophy (Chimakonam 2015). This will provide a standard and guide against illicit philosophising in contemporary African philosophy.

In the face of the criticisms leveled against the Universalist and Ethnophilosophy, the Conversationalist school becomes a veritable replacement for both schools. This school argues that the philosophers who tried to dismantle both the Universalist and Ethnophilosophy during the Great Debate had not proposed any form of replacement for these schools of thought, thereby leaving an empty space in the debate and conversation (Chimakonam, 2015). The Conversationalist school as a new epoch in African philosophy, has come to fill that gap.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ also has to do with formulating and reformulating propositions in ordinary language such that the meaning will be broken down as much as possible.
2. _____ posits that philosophizing in Africa will be more robust and thought provoking if the different cultures could come together in dialogue, in order to present a template for the evolution and reconstruction of ideas that pre-dominate African philosophy.

1.4 Summary

These schools of thought in contemporary African philosophy have no doubt, strengthened the discussion and the enterprise of African philosophy a lot. We have learnt that the background of contemporary African philosophy was the fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism, to liberate Africa and set her up for sustainable development. It was a philosophy of liberation. But the question of whether Africa has truly been liberated today is an ongoing question which should be left to every African to answer. But despite the answer each individual may give to the above question, it remains an indisputable fact that the travails of African philosophy and African culture and civilization in the hands of the European colonialists and cultural hegemonists were curbed to a large extent, by contemporary African philosophers. This unit has been able to treat contemporary African philosophy while analyzing some of the schools that emerged as a result of the struggles of contemporary African scholars against colonial denigration. The school of logical positivism believes that science should be the only tool with which to measure philosophy. To them, there is not much difference between philosophical methods and the scientific method. They are related to the philosophers of the Vienna Circle and believe that positivism is the only way forward for philosophy. The Good, according to scholastics is God. So the meaning and mission of philosophy is the search for God and its moral and spiritual function is said to be more important to the scholastics than its technical, theoretical, or materialist functions (Nwala 2010: 129). Oladipo (2000: 17) argues that there is crisis of relevance due to the kind of training given to students of philosophy in African Universities. This training, he maintains, is heavily reliant on the views of Western philosophers and scholars. The training gives African students the impression that Western Philosophy is the beginning and the end of philosophy. The crisis of relevance lies in the fact that, despite these philosophers being of African descent, they will always try to solve African problems and contribute to African issues using Western ideas (ibid). The scholastic school maintains that religion and philosophy should be fused together and there is really not much difference between both. And lastly, the school of materialist philosophy argues that philosophy should serve no other purpose but that of leading and the midwife of observable material social changes. This school as we have said, is a call for mass action; a call for the people to arise from passivity or inactivity to activity and participation in the affairs of their nations. By so doing, humanity is expected to feel the impact of philosophy.

1.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Analytic philosophy;2. Conversationalist School |
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Unit 2 The Theory of African Humanism

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 The Concept of Humanism
 - 2.3.1 The Concept of African Humanism
 - 2.3.2 The Challenge of Post-Modernism
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

2.1 Introduction

In a bid to provide an appropriate response to the lingering question of whether there exists anything called African philosophy, African philosophers have unearthed a particular type of philosophy which is basically humanist in orientation and ideology. This brand of philosophy has been tagged African humanism. This brand of philosophy has its foundation in the African worldview which is overtly humanistic in orientation and characterization (Elejo 2014). In other words, the African outlook views everything according to its relationship with the human person. Every philosophy has its orientation and existential base, an acceptable mode, which can serve as a canon of identification. Azenabor (2010) maintains that there is always a certain minimal organic relationship among its elements in order to have such a general characterization. For example, we have the British empiricism, American pragmatism, German idealism, Russian materialism, and Indian spiritualism. There is always a style of philosophy that is persistent or dominant in a people's orientation, and that philosophy can be seen as the primary philosophy prevalent among such people. It is against this backdrop that we consider African humanism as a philosophical ideology and orientation prevalent in Africa and primary to the people's way of thought. The African believes that the human person is of far greater value than any possession or anything whatsoever in nature. That is why the Igbo have the name *Mmaduka*. The name simply echoes the fact that there is nothing under the sun which could be used to compare a human being. It is the contention of African humanism that the African values the human person and relationships more than everything on earth. And that this worldview should be preserved and promoted to the world stage as part of Africa's rich cultural heritage. Therefore, African humanism is a philosophy that extols not only the good of the human person and the relationship with others, but also the good of the African person as the main purpose of all actions in this worldview (Elejo 2014). It entails an active

concern for the welfare of the human person as the central object of policy (Elejo 2014). This ideology of African humanism encourages the best in the evolution of society and the treatment of mankind, and in the exploitation or use of her natural environment (Igwe 2002: 189). This implies that even ecological concern forms part of the humanist orientation of an African. This unit examines the core ideas of African humanism.

2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of humanism
- explain the African concept of humanism
- discuss the major comparisons between African and Western humanism
- analyse the post-modernist critique against humanism.

2.3 The Concept of Humanism

The idea of humanism appeared as a protest to the personal immortality of Christianity. It is a call for man to make the most of the current world in form of achievements and building a better life on earth (Azenabor 2010). It argues that all human values and morality could be grounded in this earthly existence and experience. There is no conscious survival after death, so we should endeavour to make maximum use of the time we live in order to affect people's lives and make positive impacts on our world. Humanism as an ideology believes that one's service to fellow men is the ultimate moral ideal of the society; nothing could be compared to rendering service to humanity and contributing one's quota to the development and welfare of humanity. "It repudiates discrimination and reaffirms the spirit of cosmopolitanism, the spirit of international friendship, brotherhood, and compassionate concern for fellow human beings throughout the globe" (Azenabor 2010: 111).

Humanism as a concept, just like the materialist we studied above, is more interested in the solution of the problems of the human being. It is a human-centered concept. It considers all forms of the supernatural as myth and sees nature as the totality of being, drawing from the laws of science and believing that man is an evolutionary product of nature. The ultimate goal is the improvement of his condition and welfare. This places the concept as an important ideology for Africans who are badly in need of improvement on their lives and welfare.

There is this concern that philosophy is unprogressive; discussing the same questions that were discussed in ancient Greece, which do not

have any bearing on the individual or humanity in general (Sogolo 1993: 18). This geared up the humanist philosophers, who are bent on making sure that philosophy becomes a tool for societal reconstruction and cohesion. To them, we should not always be talking about issues that were prevalent thousands of years ago in ancient Greece. Philosophy should be used to settle real life issues and uplift humanity. Philosophical concepts and principles should not be discussed for their own theoretical interests, but for the application on the understanding and improvement of human life. Masolo (1994: 170) has argued that philosophy must be practical to the extent of being able to change and transform society. It should not be about theories alone.

The humanists maintain that there must be a connection between philosophy and the problems of the society; it must serve the community and humanity in general. The stance of the humanists is in contradiction with the anti-humanists which hold that all consciousness is casually or structurally determined, and so humanism places so much on the decisive influence of social, economic and psychological structures, as man is left just as a pawn in the game of life, or the self-determination of the individual is only but an illusion (Elejo 2014). But the human person is called upon to make the best of life in this world, take delight in earthly achievement, and build a better life here on earth; thereby rejecting religious scholasticism and humble piety (Mautner 2000).

Azenabor (2010: 113) expresses that there are five stages and dimensions to humanism:

- The ethical sense of humanism involves the belief that human beings should be accorded compassion and respect;
- The sociological sense argues that social structures are best viewed as the products of human agents;
- The historical sense denotes periods such as renaissance, in which man became the center of scholarly attention. This sense may also connote the belief that there is an important distinction between man and animals;
- The fourth is the idea that human beings are sovereign, as against the issue of the divine or supernatural. Some scholars have criticized this idea as an atheistic dimension of humanism. In this stage, humanism becomes the opposite of supernaturalism, insisting that man should rely on his own capacities rather on some supernatural powers believed to exist; and
- The fifth sense is placing primacy on human sense or nature. This puts primacy on the importance of the virtue shared by humans as a result of their humanity. And in this sense, we talk of “Africinity” or Africanness”.

If man relies on the power of reason, courage and vision, he will become the master of his own destiny. The first notable humanist was Protagoras, the Greek philosopher who famously said that “man is the measure of all things”. Humanism is a universal phenomenon; it is present in all civilizations. At any point where man becomes the center of active intellectual, religious, philosophical, ideological and artistic concern, humanism is said to have taken place (Azenarbo 2010: 115).

2.3.1 The Concept of African Humanism

African humanism is, simply put, the adaptation of the humanist ideology to the concrete situation of the African. It is an attempt to identify values, practices and cultures indigenous to Africa which set Africans apart from other peoples of the world. That is, humanism from the African point of view, the African experience. Azenabor (2010: 115) stresses that African humanism sets the pattern of African thought and defines its style, methodology and terms of expression. African humanism believes in the worth and possibilities of the African, emphasizing on the African person, his dignity and culture, rather than science and technology which is the emphasis of the West. Azenabor (2010) maintains that African humanism stresses interdependence and relationships among people in the society. This is obviously the idea of social interaction and cohesion which goes back to the African concept of personhood which we have studied earlier. So, there is a valid relationship between the African conception of the human person and that of African humanism. Both stress the need for social engineering and cohesion. Obioha & Okaneme (2017) declare that African humanism is a community-based idea; meaning that the community is the concern of the concept. They insist that there is really not much difference between African communalism and African humanism. Communalism is a doctrine of social organizations, relations and networking; making it an offshoot of African humanism. African humanism constitutes all human beings into one universal family of humankind having one universal father-God (Obioha & Okaneme 2017). They assert that:

In descending into a human society, the human person does not live a solitary and uncooperative life (the type that characterizes Hobbes' state of nature. This is itself a rejection of the concept of the state of nature, as explicated by Hobbes and other eighteenth-century European philosophers who asserted the existence of an original pre-social character of man) but from the outset is involved in an intricate web of social relationships with other humans in the society (Obioha & Okaneme 2017: 46).

This idea further expands the belief that man in the African conception of humanism is an important, not an isolated entity, but a part and parcel of the whole societal process, relations and cohesion.

African humanism believes in God, and also believes that man, being a creation of God, also possesses some of the intrinsic values and characters of God, hence deserved of some form of dignity and self-respect. That we are all children of God has a way of influencing the values and unity attached to the African people (Obioha & Okaneme 2017). And the belief in the human soul which permeates all human beings constitutes all persons into a universal family of humankind and brotherhood. Everybody has the nature of man (soul) and merits dignity and self-worth. This communal personhood simply means that man is a social animal who is able to interact and relate within the community, and also pursue his own dignity, as well as the dignity of others. African humanism states that human beings deserve help and therefore ought to be helped, and that human beings should be the object of moral standard of the society. It is aimed at creating a sense of authenticity, and dedicated not to abstract thinking and conceptual analysis, but to finding purpose and meaning in the African life and existence (Azenabor 2010: 115).

With African humanism we appreciate the significance of philosophy within the African context and environment; thereby helping to deepen the African sense of fellowship and solidarity (ibid). So, man needs his fellow man to overcome life's challenges, and life's ambitions are better achieved in a cooperative and communitarian environment where all hands will be on deck to think out solutions and proffer them accordingly. As the Igbo use to say, *Igwe bu ike* (there is strength in a crowd) and *I di n'otuotu bu ike* (unity is strength). The above sayings typify the essence of African humanism. Just like the materialist school, it is a clarion call for a unity of action and for philosophy to be used as launch pad for social change. And the only agent of this change is the human person.

Godwin Azenabor (2010: 124) discusses the major differences between the African and Western humanism. One major difference he identifies is that African humanism does not take analysis as its central focus as it is in the West. He maintains that unlike the African humanist ideology, the West has this obsession for system building and the search for certainty. According to him, that is what has led the West to be able to control and dominate nature including every living thing in it. The Western idea of humanism requires the ability to analyze and explain phenomena. Whereas the African literary culture takes interpretation as its own main focus, the West talks more about analysis (Azenabor 2010: 125). But this attitude of interpretation, as

Azenabor explains, constitutes a viable alternative to the pure analysis of the West. Again, the African doctrine of interdependence and communitarianism is in opposition to the Western doctrine of individualism. The African concept of humanism has this communitarian outlook, as against the Western idea of everybody being overly independent of the community.

Another major difference in the African humanism is about holism rather than the Western atomism. In holism, the whole is greater than the parts. Holism upholds systems and it is with the holistic system of thought that we are able to establish synthesis of human knowledge. This is quite different from the Western view of atomism where the part is said to be of more importance than the whole. In the African humanism, the part is nothing without the whole, because it is the whole that gives legitimacy and existence to the parts.

The African humanism also goes back to the past, to draw from the African traditional/indigenous past. Having the African tradition as major source of knowledge is a major difference between the Western and African concepts of humanism. The sources of inspiration for both types of humanism differ greatly. While the Western humanism will be inspired by Western tradition, the African humanist will always be influenced by his own traditions and customs. Azenabor also notes that another source of difference between both forms of humanism is the urge of the African to co-exist with, instead of conquering nature and the world. While the Westerner wants to conquer the world by virtue of his extreme individualism and quest to scientifically subjugate the rest of the world, the African sees nature and the world as a home where he needs to exist comfortably and feel at home. The African humanist understands that the universe is part and parcel of reality; therefore, if he brings any form of damage to the universe, he is also damaging himself.

Another source of difference is the metaphysical outlook of the African ontology. The ontology of the African is replete with beings which are spiritual forces and even the ancestors and other beings; visible, invisible, concrete and abstract existence. This is what Azenabor (2010) calls “spiritual empiricism”; meaning that when the right spiritual apparatus is applied, even nothing will become something. He finalises it thus:

- 1) Values derive from human interest - what is good is what promotes human interest, what is decent for man, what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity, joy to man and his community. And what is morally bad or objectionable is what brings misery, misfortune and disgrace and what is hateful to both the spiritual and ancestral beings. So, African humanism is founded exclusively on the consideration of the African wellbeing.

- (2) Human fellowship or communion is the most important of human needs, hence inter-dependence and communalism rather than individualism. This is an offshoot of African cultural ontology, which is holistic - there are no isolated individuals, man is a being in relations to others, life is sharing. This spirit is important to uphold human dignity which is the basis of African humanism - the conscious attempt to demonstrate a concern for human interest and problems in Africa in order to enhance progress and development. Humanism is therefore a concern for a necessity of finding a harmony between cultures. It is an attitude of accepting the other for what he is, simply as a human being, irrespective of his individuality or characteristic. But post modernism is opposed to this harmony or commonness (Azenabor 2010: 126-127).

2.3.2 The Challenge of Post-Modernism

Post-modernism has posed a very serious challenge to the concept of humanism in general. Post-modernism is both a form of culture and thought. As a form of culture, it emphasizes pluralism and the belief that we should celebrate difference. As a form of thought it is suspicious of the classical notion of truth, reason, identity, objectivity, universalism, and any form of single framework or ultimate grounds of explanation (Eagleton 1996). This simply means that post-modernism does not accept ultimate thinking and value standards in the society. It preaches against absolutist excesses and questions the validity of taking any form of model or reality as a standard or yardstick for judging others. It does not agree that the society should set standard on how people should behave or how they should relate with one another in the society. The moral standard and values of the society should be set aside and people should be treated according to the way they have decided to live their lives. The society should be all-embracing and no one should be rejected because of the moral standards such a person has decided to maintain. The post-modernist movement argues that truth has many sides; hence no one should use a particular side or version of truth to impose judgment on another person. Adopting a particular standard and using it as a yardstick to judge others, just like in humanism, is anti-freedom, and dictatorial, hence it is not acceptable in the modern world.

The idea of a dominating mode of thought like humanism really needs reconstruction because no specific system in the world provides an absolute. This is comparable to Karl Popper's critical rationalism. No intellectual tradition in the world is capable of serving as the universal paradigm from which every other alternative should be assessed. It is against universalism, immutability, sameness, and essentialism

(Azenabor 2010: 128). Truth is a relative thing and setting universal standards for anything is a mistaken idea.

No universal standard should be set, rather the world should celebrate diversity of ideas and alternatives, as it is the hallmark of the modern world. To them, there is no essence, or common in the sense of certain properties that humans share based on their Africanity or humanity. It is just about the individual person and his unique ideals and characters. It poses a radical challenge to any system that adopts absolute values, culturalism, metaphysical foundations, and identity; it mobilizes multiplicity, non-identity, anti-foundation, and cultural relativism against these values (ibid, p128). It believes that allowing multiculturalism is tolerance, and the idea of setting standards can even be seen as racism and anti-Semitism. As Azenabor (2010) asserts, the main thrusts of post-modernism are: “There is no absolute or universal truth, knowledge, reality and morality.”

This simply implies that the post-modernists believe that philosophy should close shop; as well as its essential branches like ethics and metaphysics. We only have interpretations which are according to our biases, race, class and gender. Post-modernism is a profound attack on the idea of standard and moral values, but we can imagine what can happen in our world when we set no standard moral values or when we lower them to mean just everything anybody thinks. Morality and values should not be anything anybody thinks, they should not just be based on individual standards. There are universal values and morality also is universal; people can only strive to meet with these universal standards. So the fact that some people have decided not to even try to strive does not mean that these standards do not exist. Besides, postmodernism mistakes perception for truth. Different people perceive different aspects of the truth. But none of these perceptions represents the truth. As they are, they are just approximations of the truth. They are simply aspects of the truth, not the truth itself.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ is the adaptation of the humanist ideology to the concrete situation of the African
2. Azenarbo identifies _____ dimensions to humanism

2.4 Summary

The idea of humanism is broadly based on the idea of seeking for human welfare and dignity. It is the concept of keeping the human being at the center of every activity in the world. Academics and philosophy in

particular, should not be about abstractions, but about the human being, about solving real life problems of man. African humanism brings the concept of humanism home to Africa; it gives it a coloration that is based on African values, culture and tradition. At the center of the African worldview is the idea of communitarianism, the idea that the whole is greater than the part, that one person cannot do it alone. That is what informs that idea of African humanism, and that is also a point of departure from the Western concept of humanism. Post-modernism has been a huge challenge to the concept of African humanism; accusing it of authoritarianism and lack of inclusion. Post-modernists argue that setting of standards in the world is akin to imposing bias standards on other people. This unit has been able to introduce the student the concept of humanism; and especially the concept of African humanism. We have analyzed the concept and understood that humanism is a clarion call for philosophy to arise from dogmatic slumber, to arise and be able to affect human life in tangible forms. African humanism is concerned with the values and life practices indigenous to Africa and which distinguish them from Europeans. The spirit of humanism shapes the thoughts and daily lives of the Africans. It is an attempt to understand man and nature as regards to relationships with others. The idea of African humanism is also connected to the idea of African communalism and cooperation, which keeps everyone bound together. Azenabor (2010: 130) insists that the idea of tracing African humanism to the African traditional past is based on the fact that when one does not have a good knowledge of the past; it will be difficult to have a clear vision of the present and of the future. We must look at our past in order to formulate a clear, progressive, relevant and positive idea of the future. One must have a good knowledge of the past before one can think clearly and coherently of the future. Knowledge of the past is essential for the African in order to understand where we are coming from as a people, and where we are supposed to go.

2.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. African humanism;2. Five |
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Unit 3 Some African Political Theories

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 Nyerere's Ujamaa
- 3.4 Nkrumah's Consciencism
- 3.5 Fanon's Theory of Violent Revolution
- 3.6 Summary
- 3.7 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 3.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

3.1 Introduction

As we have noted earlier, colonialism helped to engender a defensive and liberation-based political philosophy among Africans (Sogolo 1993: 186). It was partly the need for freedom from oppression and exploitation that led African Philosopher-Kings of the post independent era to propound people-oriented political theories that helped African liberation from colonialism and neocolonialism. Another major influencing factor is the African socialism; the idea that that we should care for ourselves and act as a united force, instead of acting individually to the detriment of the community. Marxism came to be the endearing idea of these early African leaders, as there was a unity of vision between the ideas of African identity and freedom, and some elements of Marxism (Makumba 2007: 113). The social and political thinking in Africa is determined by the social conditions in which Africans find themselves (Sogolo 1993: 185), and the conditions they found themselves pre and post- independence. Professional academics have the responsibility of directing new political theories and ideas, but that was not the case in Africa, where social and political theorists have been men of active political leanings and participation, who seek to make meaning out of what they do by formulating these views (Sogolo 1993:186). Those early strugglers against colonialism were also Western educated folks, who had been aware of the dangers of colonialism through their contact with Western education. The goals of the social political theorists of Africa should change now. In other words, the socio-political African theorist should understand that there are more to be set as the goals of the African continent than mere political or economic liberation from colonialism. Where there were social conflicts between the colonialists and the natives for instance, that was gone at the end of colonialism, and the focus will inevitably shift to internal strives among natives (Sogolo 1993). Another area of concentration after colonialism should be to liberate Africans from the conflicting ideologies of the so-called developed countries of the

world. The African continent is still currently caught in the midst of these ideological warfare of the West, despite having won independence for many decades. Currently, Africa is still actively caught between the political philosophy of China and the West. These competing economic and military forces of the world have continued to profit from the Africa's lack of leadership by providing slavish loans and other aids which make African countries indebted, thereby robbing them of their voice in the international community. So, African political philosophers of this time should be more aware of, and in touch with the current realities of the continent.

3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the background to African political philosophy
- analyse concepts like Ujamaa, Negritude, Consciencism and violent resistance in African political philosophy
- discuss the importance of these political ideologies in the emancipation of African independence.

3.3 Nyerere's Ujamaa

Julius Nyerere was the former President of Tanzania. He was born in 1922, and he studied in the University of Edinburgh, where he bagged a Master's Degree in History and Political Economy. He was also the first Tanzanian to study in a British University and just the second to gain a university degree outside Africa. He returned to Tanzania in 1952 and quickly became involved in politics, and worked hard to bring a number of different nationalist factions into one umbrella and formed the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). In 1954, Nyerere's integrity, ability as a political orator and organizer, and his readiness to work with different groups was significant in winning the independence of Tanzania without bloodshed (Abanuka 2013, p106). In the 1960s, Tanzania was one of the world's poorest countries; this made the position of Nyerere as President a very difficult one. The country was suffering from a severe foreign debt burden, like many other African countries then and now. The prices of commodities were high and the foreign aids were no longer coming because of their fight against colonialism and exploitation. He inherited from the colonialist a country that was on the highway to economic and political implosion; hunger became the order of the day and the economic hardship bit so severely on the people. At this juncture, we may then ask: what is the main doctrine of *Ujamaa*?

Nyerere decided to tackle this problem by advocating socialism with a human face, which he christened *Ujamaa* socialism. It is a Kwaswahili word which is translated as familyhood or brotherhood (Makumba 2007: 140). He believed that family is embracive of all human beings and the human society at large. The concept of African socialism, to Nyerere, is extended to the whole world, and the African sees the entire humanity as brethren and members of his ever-extending family (Makumba 2007). His brand of socialism was deeply based on the idea of African socialism, and therefore opposed to the idea of capitalism which was viewed at that time as a weapon of Western exploitation and oppression, and Marxist socialism which seeks happiness through strife between persons. African communalism is never any of these, rather it is an idea rooted in the belief of being one's brother's keeper. Nyerere believed that humanness in its fullest sense, rather than wealth creation, should come first, as societies improve through the improvement of people rather than gearing up of production (Abanuka 2013: 106).

Ujamaa involved that people worked and lived on a cooperative basis in organized villages or familyhood. It was not a product of class struggle but born from the very nature of African society which highly values the responsibility towards and relationship with tribesmen and community. Nyerere defines his socialism thus:

Socialism – like democracy – is an attitude of the mind. In a socialist society it is the socialist attitude of the mind, and not the rigid adherence to standard political pattern, which is needed to ensure that people care for each other's welfare... It has nothing to do with the possession or non-possession of wealth. Destitute people can be potential capitalists – exploiters of their fellow human beings... But a man who uses his wealth for the purpose of dominating his fellows is a capitalist. So would the man who would if he could! (cf Makumba 2007: 140-141).

Ujamaa was a political theory which combined nation-building policies with a social and economic development strategy. It was based on the idea that full development could only be achieved in a condition of full autonomy and self-reliance (Fouere, 2014) rather relying on foreign aid and investment. Green (1995) asserts that Nyerere promoted a moral economy based upon justice and equality for all, it was built of concrete government policies like communitisation of the work force, the collectivization of the means of production, the nationalization of private businesses and housing, the provision of public services- especially in healthcare and education (Cliffe & Saul 1972). It was reliant on a powerful state controlled by the bureaucracy and a one-party system.

Nyerere provides a home for many African liberation movements including the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC), and a host of others. The doctrine of *Ujamaa* preaches that if a society is so organized that it is concerned with the interest of each member, on the condition that he should work, then no individual in the society will occupy himself with what ought to be tomorrow, for which he would strive to amass wealth today (Abanuka 2013: 108). The attempt to accumulate an unending wealth is anti-social because it is an attempt to outdo the rest of the citizens in everything, including clothing, housing, comfort, and so on.

Idleness was not tolerated as it was regarded as an inconceivable dishonour. The lazy, the parasite, who sat down, intending to profit from the hospitality of the society as a right, but gave nothing in return, was not welcome, as that is not the African way of life. In African traditional society, every member of the community, apart from infants and infirm, contributes in the work that gave rise to the production of good in the community. No one was left behind, so the issue of laziness and parasitism was not tolerated. Nyerere argues that the traditional African never has employees to work for him until the arrival foreign capitalists. Socialism for him is also a distributive dispensation and not only a system of production (Makumba 2007: 141). It is not only enough to produce the good, but the ability and will to distribute them equitably also matters.

Love, sharing and work are the basic principles for the existence of any society. The primitive idea of equality of all human beings is the foundation of the socialist society, and the equality has to be applied to the different sectors of the society, economic, political, and social. Every 14th of October in Tanzania is celebrated as Nyerere Day. It is a public holiday, marking the death of the statesman and the commemoration is organised in the major cities where politicians celebrate and pay tribute to the contributions of Nyerere to Tanzania and the whole of Africa.

3.4 Nkrumah's Consciencism

Born in Western Ghana around 18th September, 1909, Nkrumah entered Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1935 where he studied, philosophy, economics sociology and education. He was also interested in the writings of Marx and Lenin, and nationalism, especially Marcus Garvey, the Black American leader of the 1920s. When he came back to Ghana, he was invited to become the general secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), formed by his countryman J.B Danquah. He was responsible for addressing meetings all over Ghana and the creation of a socio-political base for the new movement

of liberation. Nkrumah formed the Convention People's Party in 1949, to take advantage of a social split within the UGCC; this split was between the middle-class leaders of the party and the more radical supporters of Nkrumah. Nkrumah became the first independent president of Ghana in 1957.

Nkrumah's vision for Africa was that of socialism of consciencism. He looked forward to the emergence of Africa as a vital world force after the freedom from colonialism and economic domination. Thus, he believed that the building of socialism in Ghana had to be accompanied with the building of socialism all over Africa (Makumba 2007: 136). He was eager to reconcile his own socialist ideas with the African personality and Pan-Africanism. His idea was that of a united Africa that could act with oneness of purpose and of mind. For him, socialism is the only socio-economic political system which shares the ideals of the African traditional communal societies; it should be the system to be adopted for the harmony of the African society. The process of liberation from colonialism and to national unity is marked by some stages; the first stage being the independence from colonialism and imperialism, the second stage is the stage of consciencism, where there will be a roadmap for the ways in which Africa would gain genuine independence by thwarting the whims and caprices of neo-colonialism, another stage is the taking of positive actions against internal enemies and the formation of a mass party. In 1964, Ghana was officially designated as a one-party state, with Nkrumah as life president of both country and party (Abanuka 2013: 94). This is what commentators regard as one of the undoing of Nkrumah and his ideology of consciencism.

Philosophical Consciencism involves the dialectical relationship and unity between the traditional, Christian and Islamic Africa, in order to create a distinct form of the African personality. It is the philosophy of decolonization. The triangle represents the tripartite elements of the African society and at the base of the triangle is the communal African society which upholds the principles of humanism and egalitarianism. That base represents the foundation upon which the harmonization and the accommodation of the sides of the triangle is to be built, it digests and absorbs the other sides. The main doctrine of consciencism is the accommodation of the Euro-Christian and Islamic ideas by African traditional way of life. The African tradition should digest the foreign elements in order to bring harmony that will bring back the egalitarian and communal principles of traditional African society. Nkrumah insists that the Western and Islamic ideologies could be developed in such a way that they will be able to fit into the African personality (Nkrumah 1970: 79). "Capitalism is but a gentleman's way of slavery" (Nkrumah: 1970: 72). Consciencism defines African personality as:

...the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. Philosophical consciencism is the philosophical standpoint which, taking its start from the present content of African conscience, indicates the way in which progress is forged out of the conflicts in that conscience (Nkrumah 1970: 72).

The basis for such philosophical consciencism is materialism, but matter is not to be construed as being inert. Matter has both absolute and independence existence and capacity for self-motion. The materialism of Nkrumah in consciencism accommodates spirits (Abanuka 2013: 96). Nkrumah did not envision a kind of socialism that will bring some sort of Marxist revolution, but one that is a natural evolution from traditional communalism.

Nkrumah's style of government was authoritarian, but his popularity rose as new roads, bridges, schools, and healthcare facilities were built. Also, his policy of Africanisation created better career opportunities for Ghanaians. One of the major criticisms of Nkrumah was his totalitarian and autocratic style of leadership.

In 1958, Nkrumah's government legalized imprisonment without trial of those considered to be security risks. His focus on the generality of the African continent soon began to make him loose touch with realities at home in Ghana (Abanuka 2013). And his government was involved in bogus and ruinous development projects that made a once prosperous Ghana to become crippled with debts. His government's second development plan was abandoned in 1961, by which time the deficit in the balance of payment was more than \$125 million. These economic difficulties led to a wide labor unrest, and to a general strike in 1961 (Abanuka 2013).

As the economic situation worsened and the shortages of foodstuff and other goods became chronic, Nkrumah was overthrown by the army and police in 1966, and Nkrumah found Asylum in Guinea.

3.5 Fanon's Theory of Violent Revolution

Franz Fanon was born in 1925, in Martinique, where he was first educated and later continued in France. He studied medicine and psychiatry and came in contact with North Africa while serving in the French army. He worked in an Algerian hospital during the uprising against the French, and later joined the Algerian rebels in 1954 to fight for Algeria's independence. He died in 1961 at the age of 36.

Fanon's travels brought him face to face with the experience of racism in Europe, African and the French Caribbean (Makumba 2007: 144).

Fanon was very critical of Europe's demeaning of the Negro, as well as the attempt by the blacks to find refuge-fulfillment in white personality. He described that as the fantasy of the Negritude movement, despite its attempt to free the native intellectuals from dependence on metropolitan culture (Makumba 2007: 144). He saw the return of violence for violence as a refusal not to be treated as animals, and the only way one can recapture his humanity from the oppressor. J.P Sartre puts it succinctly in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*:

Hatred, blind hatred, which is as yet an abstraction, is their only wealth; the Master calls it forth because he seeks to reduce them to animals, but he fails to break it down because his interests stop him halfway. Thus the 'half natives' are still humans, through the power and the weakness of the oppressor which is transformed within them into a stubborn refusal of the animal condition (Fanon 1980: 15)

Fanon believes that decolonization should be a violent phenomenon because it has to do with two opposing forces; forces that result from and are nourished by the situation in the colonies. It should be violent because it seeks to correct a situation which was also instituted by violence. The way colonialism sought to uproot colonised natives from their cultural placing, and create out of them new creatures at the disposal of the colonizer, so will decolonisation become a veritable way of creating individuals who will have the capacity and courage to free themselves through any means possible, including violence.

Makumba (2007) explains that Fanon was not advocating violence for the sake of it, but rather was encouraging the colonized to be ready for it because it seeks to put the society upside down and making the first to become the last, and vice versa. The situation of clash between the white ideology of oppression and exploitation, and the idea of freedom raging in the mind of the native, is already an active strife. But the native should not surrender his heritage and culture without a fight. Because they did not go to meet the colonialists in their country, but the colonialists came to Africa to culturally displace us and rob us of our God-given natural endowments. It is not an issue of sheepish surrender; it must be a fight to finish because that is the only option left for the oppressed native. The black should know that the only true liberation is the liberation from the desire to be white; liberation must be a return to the self, the restoration of things to their proper places (Makumba 2007: 145). Fanon (1980: 176) explains:

This is because the native intellectual has thrown himself greedily upon Western culture. Like adopted children who only stop investigating the new family framework at the moment when a minimum nucleus of security crystallizes in their psyche, the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own.

The native intellectuals, according to Fanon, should also be liberated from the clutches of European culture in order to embrace the native cultures and ways of life. He describes it as the native “tearing himself away from the swamp” (Fanon 1980: 175). The black man must move from the situation of alienation and degradation which was never intended by God, to the point of self-redemption and worth.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ involves the dialectical relationship and unity between the traditional, Christian and Islamic Africa, in order to create a distinct form of the African personality.
2. _____ believes that decolonization should be a violent phenomenon because it has to do with two opposing forces.

3.6 Summary

The response of African intellectuals and political leaders to colonial oppression and suppression has been discussed in so many platforms and in many academic research works. The fact that the average traditional African is communal by instinct made it possible for all these political theories to tilt towards the need to cater for the needs of the majority. As Fanon (1980: 28) notes, decolonisation influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It was really the case for African nationalists who fought European exploitation and degradation ideologically. It transformed them to “privileged actors” with the glare of history’s floodlights on them. Through their actions, Africans “became men” during the process of decolonisation. It gave a new impetus to the age-long African attempts to free itself from the clutches of slavery and racism; it gave Africa a new brand of heroes who rose to the occasion in order to salvage the continent by putting their individual intellectual and political effort. This unit has been able to open our eyes to some of Africa’s political philosophies of the 20th century. These ideologies helped to usher in a new era of African consciousness, their deficiencies notwithstanding. As we can see, all the concepts revolve around this African concept of communitarianism which the student is advised to take a closer look at by consulting other relevant materials and reading as wide as possible. If colonialism threw up African men of timber and caliber that fought to liberate the continent from exploitation and oppression, it is also a clarion call for this generation of African leaders to arise from slumber and take the bull by the horn in order to take the continent to the next stage of political and economic development and/or liberation. The African continent is still a developing one after over six decades that some the African countries had independence. This is a great challenge to the present crop of intellectuals in the continent.

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3.8 Possible Answers to SAEs

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Philosophical Consciencism; 2. Frantz Fanon |
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Unit 4 African Traditional Thought System

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 Theories of Thought
 - 4.3.1 African Traditional Thought and Western Thought
 - 4.3.2 Challenges of Modern African Thought System
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

4.1 Introduction

This unit will introduce you to African traditional thought system. African thought is essentially a form of integrative thought; binding everything together in a form of unanimism. It is also communal and a form of holism. The whole is greater than the part and the African looks at reality from a holistic perspective. The Africa way of thinking is more concrete than the Western abstract scientific way of thought. It is pre-scientific because it implies the everyday knowing, the common-sense knowledge of things. The African does not compartmentalise reality; it is taken as a whole. Both the physical, spiritual and material worlds form a part and parcel of one reality. Again, we shall also find out that the African thought is spiritual because spiritualism is a part of life, and everything has spiritual implications according to the African way of thought. The African thought is also dynamic in that it believes in powers which must be acquired to make life more meaningful. Such powers give man control over the world, and owing to the capricious nature of the African traditional world, the African spends most of his life acquiring spiritual powers to help him manipulate his environment to his advantage and to the advantage of his community. In the course of our study, we have seen that there is a way the traditional African thinks, which is quite distinct from the thought system of people from the other parts of the world. This unit will take a cursory look at those thought patterns of the African tradition.

4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the African thought system
- analyse the basic attributes of the African thought system
- differentiate between the modes of thought in Africa and in the West
- describe and appraise the challenges of modern African thought system.

4.3 Theories of Thought

We can know the theories of thought better only after understanding what thought is. What is thought? Thought is a system of reinforcing what is already in a person. It is a complex and unbroken process that underlie the world. Thought emanates because of previous ideas and experiences one has had. There is a relationship between thought system and language; meaning that thought is a flow of meaning. An individual thinking must correspond to the overall thinking of the larger society; meaning that the society and culture influences what the individual thinks. That is why it is called a system; it is culture-based and every society will have the individuals think in a certain way which will help to perpetuate the cultural values of the society. There is no thought without a cultural value to which it corresponds. Therefore, there is a relationship between culture and thought. So, since thought system should agree with an already established system of ideas, it means that it is culture specific. Thought is an instrument of organizing the world; it creates meaning out of meaninglessness, stability from chaos and instability, and order out of disorder (Osegenwune 2011: 114).

Thought is a process of arranging ideas in a pattern of relationships or adding new ideas soon to be related to such a pattern. It also means to turn something over in the mind or to have a specified opinion. It is to determine something by reflection (Osegenwune 2011). Thinking and especially critical thinking is the theme of philosophy. Thought is the base of cognitive activities; it involves the manipulation and analysis of information received from the environment. It is a mental process through which we process and analyze the acquired or existing information from nature. Such processing and analysis occur by means of abstracting, reasoning, imagining, problem solving, judging, and decision making.

Thought is mostly done systematically and it is also goal-oriented. It is an internal activity which can only be inferred from overt behavior. It becomes a standardized system when it has to do with a community or a certain group of people. Arlow (1958) has argued that a thought system is an essential attribute of any culture, and civilizations have survived by deriving thought systems from their environment and modifying them as need be, in order to continue to fit into the contemporary society. There is also the individual thought and thinking, but what we should concern ourselves here is the thinking of a people; the thought system associated with a particular people, like the Africans, Europeans, Chinese, and so on. Thought system, having a root in the culture of a people, gives birth eventually to the philosophy of such a people. That is the way European thought system gave birth to Western philosophy, and African

thought system also produced what we now know as African philosophy. Language has also been identified as the vehicle for thought (Osegenwune 2011) such that without a language, it will be impossible for us to convey our thoughts, and express it outside ourselves. If we don't have a language of expression, other people might not be able to know what our thoughts are and what we are thinking about.

A systematic thought system also involves the way the people involved have been able to respond to and tackle the challenges that confront them. These challenges in turn, help the people to evolve a thought system to be used; just the way colonialism helped African leaders and intellectuals to evolve a system of socio-political thought with which they fought it.

A thought system must be coordinated in the sense that every member of the community will be able to key in, and to understand what the thought system represents and what it means. Children who are born into the society, by acquiring the culture of the society, automatically acquires the thought pattern of the society. As long as civilizations, cultures and environments differ, thought system will also differ. Thought determines actions and emotions too.

Sometimes the influence of thought and its power towards our actions and inactions is lost on us, we might not really know how powerful thought is until we act and witness the repercussions of our actions. Therefore, it is through the power of thought that societies enact laws and are ordered for the sake of harmony. So, in human life thought is very crucial. Following from the brief exploration of what thought is, it is now pertinent to inquire into the question: What are the theories of thought?

By theories of thought we mean some of the factors that influence the human thought and cognition. So, what specifically are these theories? How do they add to our understanding of the world? Let us commence with linguistic theory of thought.

Linguistic theory of thought: As we have said before, language is the vehicle through which thought is expressed. Without the use of language, we will not be able to pass across our thoughts and cognition. Language is a reflection of what is available in our vocabulary, word structure, and semantics which determine our thought pattern. This theory asserts that the capacity for people to think will be determined by what is available in their language, culture, and general worldview (Asoulin 2016). The idea of this is that the internal computational process of the language faculty generates linguistic objects that are

employed by the conceptual-intentional systems of thought and the sensori-motor systems to yield language production and communication (Asoulin 2016). The basic stance in this theory is that there is nothing we think about which is not in our language, so basically one cannot think beyond the limit of one's language. The linguistic theory of thought places language at a very strategic position because without language, we would not be able to communicate our thoughts; neither would we be able to think at all. Therefore, language is both the vehicle of thought and the object of thought. We can only think of what is available in our lexicon according to this theory, therefore we as Africans have a duty to begin to develop and expand our knowledge in such a way that it will accommodate as much words as possible in order for us to be able to also expand our thought limits. It is only objects and ideas that exist in one's culture and civilization that he will be able to represent in his thought system. Also a society's thought pattern will always be towards and limited to the things that can be named.

A major critique against this theory is that it presents issues as if the limit of language is the limit of thought, whereas, it is the other way round. That is, the limit of thought is the limit of language. Although language is very crucial to thought, but it does not set the limit to thought, because there are things which can be conceived but which cannot be spoken of or expressed. So the limit of thought is the limit of language. Even the possibility of non-verbal communication diminishes the potency of the argument that thought can only be conducted in language. Again, however, this argument has been countered by insisting that even non-verbal communication is still conducted in language.

Biological theory of thought: This theory argues that the neurons help us to think through the nervous cell, via electrochemical signaling. That the thought systems are triggered by nerves, because the nerves are core components of the brain, vertebrate, spinal cord, the invertebrate spinal cord, etc. everything is connected to the brain so the brain works through these parts of the body to help us think. Essentially, that thinking is coming from the brain and from the nerves that are connected to the brain. Peripheral nervous system, automatic nervous system, genetic and epigenetic regulation of brain structure and function, is a biological basis for our emotions and important chemical messages. Each of these works together to form who we are and how we respond to our environment. This thinking is philosophy, because according to Karl Jaspers: "philosophy is a process of thinking as inner action comes to an authentic awareness of himself and reality by pressing beyond or transcending everything objective" (cf Ugwuanyi 2006: 10). It comes from an inner curiosity about reality and wonder

about the universe. The biological theory of thought states that it is our environment that elicits thought in us, it is our environment that triggers our thought systems in order to respond to what we feel and how we feel. Charles Frankel in Sogolo (1993: 160) explains this theory thus:

Mankind's social institutions and mores are products not simply of traditions, historical accident, ideology or the mechanizations of ruling class, but of dispositions and drives of the human animal that has developed in the process of biological evolution and belong to the species' generic heritage.

Cognitive Psychology: This theory teaches that thought develops from one stage to the other; from stage of the child, to the adolescent and to the adult. The quality of thinking and thought differs, depending on the stage and age in life. Thought continues to grow with age. The experiences we have in life help to shape our thought pattern and quality, hence it is with age that we develop from one stage of thought to another. That is why if children behave the way they are, we always understand that with age they will know better and they will exhibit quality thinking. This might be the reason why Africans believe that parents should inculcate good morals and training in their children so as to give them the needed platform to develop quality thought as they grow. Children need the care of reasonable adults who will direct them on the right steps to take, to help them become responsible members of the community when they grow up. In African worldview, it is a source of worry when a child has not been able to develop according to his age; when he is still acting and thinking like a child when he is supposed to be a grown adult. The society scolds and reprimands such a child, because Africans believe it is not a normal situation. Going by the communitarian worldview of Africans, each member of the society is expected to contribute his quota to the wellbeing and development of the entire community when he is of age, but in a situation where he grows up to become a truant and a wonderer, instead of being a responsible member of the community, it is always blamed on wrong upbringing and lack of parental care.

4.3.1 African Traditional Thought and Western Thought

Here, we shall make a comparison of the African traditional way of thinking and the Western way of thought. This comparison was made popular by Robin Horton in his essay *African Traditional Thought and Western Science*, where he laid some fundamental differences and similarities between the two modes of thought. It will first appear that the traditional African thought does not fall within the category of explanations generally associated with science-oriented thought systems. The reason for this is that in seeking to understand events, the prevalent

explanatory models adopted by a given culture are determined by the peculiarities of that culture (Sogolo 1998: 177). This entails that the African traditional system of thought cannot be said to be totally lacking in any form of scientific orientation in comparison with the Western thought system. Sogolo (1998) agrees with Horton that both modes of thought have the commonsense and theoretical levels of thought. That both are primarily concerned with explanation, prediction, and control of natural phenomena, and secondly, in doing so, they evoke theoretical entities, albeit of different kinds. (Sogolo 1998). What then is the differentiating mark between science and traditional thought?

Science involves impersonal theoretical entities while traditional thought draws on personal theoretical entities. This simply implies that reality evolves from one stage to the other, the stage of tradition, as Horton insists, is the first stage of arriving at the scientific. The difference between both modes of thought is simply the manner of explanation; whereas the African way of thought focuses on the commonsense explanation involving the physical day to day material objects and language, the Western version of thought involves mechanisms not susceptible to observation language (Sogolo 1998). That is Horton's secondary and primary theories.

Both traditional African thought and Western science are concerned with explanation, and to create order where there is disorder and chaos. By analogy, what the African traditional diviner aims at is the same as what modern preventive medicine is aiming at. In orthodox preventive medicine, the practitioner aims at preventing his client from being attacked by or afflicted by certain diseases, he knows that his client could catch malaria when bitten by the appropriate parasite-carrying mosquito. What he does by his prescription of drugs is not to stop the parasite from causing malaria but to ensure that his client is not predisposed to it. Similarly, the traditional African diviner claims to know that events of misfortune will always occur. He cannot stop them from occurring, but he claims to be able to prevent his client from being predisposed to them. With the events of traditional Africa seen in this light, it is clear that the traditional African does not seek to control natural phenomena (Sogolo 1998: 179).

Sogolo explains that "the history of science is replete with instances of phenomena that were at one time explained in supernatural terms, but which at the dawn of experimental science had their scientific principles fully uncovered by scientists". This is to say that scientific thought proceeds from non-scientific thought. The African sees disease from a holistic perspective, which might be considered unorthodox by modern medical practice. But medicine itself, as history has taught, began from the spiritual or non-scientific approach. It began with tradition and

spiritualism as the *Hippocratic Oath* of the medical profession proves. Early medical practice in Scotland took the form where healing lay in propitiating the powers against which the patient might have offended (Clough 1981: 183, cf Sogolo 1998: 182). Such supernatural factors play an important role in all pre-literate ancient and contemporary societies of the world.

Psychological states, attitudes and beliefs also play significant roles in traditional African medicine. They now provide acceptable explanations to diseases earlier attributed to supernatural forces. That is why, according to Sogolo, the traditional African way of diagnosis takes both primary cause, which might be bewitchment which is believed by the African to be the cause of anxiety, and a secondary cause. These, he maintains, are the causes of ailment in Africa which are supernatural; the gods, deities, spirits and so on, and natural forces which are germs, parasites and so on. It is difficult to be understood by a non-African, but as Sogolo (1998: 119-130) argues, a clear dichotomy between the natural and supernatural does not exist in the African thought system. Africans always look at the “why” aspect of disease management and treatment, and not only the “how” aspect of it. The primary cause of the disease gives the traditional African healer a mirror into the secondary cause, unlike his Western counterpart who only relies on pharmacology. The healer may be confident of the pharmacological activities of his or her herbs, but that is not all, the herbs can only be efficacious only when the primary cause of the disease has been taken care of (Sogolo 1998: 183). In the words of Horton:

The gods...do perform an important theoretical job in pointing to certain interesting forms of causal connections; they are probably not useful as the basis of a wider view of the world. Nevertheless, there do seem to be few cases in which they are the basis and may have something to contribute to the theoretical framework of modern science...More specifically, there are striking resemblances between psycho-analytic ideas about the individual mind as a congeries of warring entities and the West African ideas about the body being a meeting place of multiple souls (Horton 1970).

The African pre-scientific knowledge can be compared to the Western scientific knowledge in many forms. This is to teach that cultural superiority is a mistaken idea, as every culture develops and expands according to the environments and circumstances that befall it. However, this is not to say that Africa has arrived. We are still lagging behind in technological and scientific orientations. That is the reason why we must continue to evolve, develop and update our culture and thought system, not to be like the West, but to be able to attend to the peculiar African challenges we have.

4.3.2 Challenges to Modernity in Africa

Modernity is a period characterized by the emergence and acceptance of certain norms and ideals. It is dotted by the advancement of the human race from the medieval or traditional conception of the world to a man-centered one, which gives access to forms of knowledge that have the potential for freedom, humanism and progress (Ugwuanyi 2010). The ideal which characterizes modernity for the African is humanism. The role of thought in modernity cannot be overemphasized. This is because it is through thought that societies evolve and modernize. The need to conceptualize modernity in Africa so as to serve the basic principles of African humanism has become urgent, going by the contemporary challenges of the African continent. Ideas and thought move the world, as those of Descartes, Newton, Locke and others have helped tremendously in shaping modern Western thought.

Ugwuanyi (2010) notes that the African thought and culture have a theory of humanism. That theory of humanism harbors a potential to spur a people to seek a human-centered world. So, the issue of African modern thought should hinge on this human-centered ideology of the African worldview. One of the challenges of African modernity is that modernity came to Africa as misleading positions of texts, histories and interventions that defined modernity as domination and colonialism. There was no distinction between modernization and colonialism and undue dominance (ibid). For this reason, the intervention of modernity in Africa was inhuman and took the shape of what should not be associated with man in Africa, going by the African concept of humanism.

The Western concept of modern thought which was brought to Africa by means of colonialism, slavery, and oppression is far different from the African concept of modernity. Therefore, there continues to be a clash between both ideologies in the mind of the African. Does he adopt wholly and entirely, the Western oppressive modernity, or does he stick to his own indigenous view of modernity and modernization? As we have studied, modernity in the African context is man-centered; man is the focus in everything because he is the agent at the center of modernity and civilization. But the relationship between Africa and the west in terms of models and rationale for modernization has been a tortuous one in the sense that the West sees modernization from the perspective of domination and racism, while the African sees it from the humanist perspective. Ugwuanyi (2010: 13) insists that modernity in Africa that was brought by the West was not human enough as it did not recognize even the minimum of what should amount to or define African humanism. Hence, freedom, which is the most laudable feature of modernity, was intertwined with slavery, colonialism,

exploitation, racial prejudice, and oppression. The West promoted medieval ideas in Africa in form of modernity. And that has crept into the psyche of the average African leader, who does not have regards and respect for his people; invoking colonial and oppressive policies against dissent. That cannot be said to be modernity.

Therefore, what we call modernity in Africa at the moment needs a reassessment in order to fit into a kind of modernity to take care of the most important features of the African worldview- African humanism, and also be able to tackle challenges that are uniquely African. We have seen that the material essence of philosophy is to see to the wellbeing of the human being, hence, any idea that does not conform to this should be expunged from the African world, so as to maintain a society where the welfare of the people will be the measure of the good.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. _____ holds that thought develops from one stage to the other; from stage of the child to the adolescent, and to the adult.
2. _____ involves impersonal theoretical entities while _____ draws on personal theoretical entities.

4.4 Summary

Thought systems all over the world have been centered on the cultural worldviews of the people, and the African thought system is not an exception. But we have to understand that there are still a lot of improvements for the African thought system to do. It ought to improve and develop to such an extent that it will relatively compare with contemporary thought systems in the other parts of the world. This does not mean that it will leave behind the defining feature of humanism, but it means that such development will be done in accordance with the core principle of humanism, while being able to tackle contemporary African socio-political challenges. This unit has taken us through the concept of thought and the African thought system in particular. In comparison, we found out that, whereas the African traditional thought system uses common sense, the Western mode of thought employs theories of science. The aim of the two modes of thought remains the same; that of creating order in the midst of chaos and apparent disorder. Again, virtually all civilizations began from the cultural and supernatural perspective, before proceeding to the modern. But the challenge for Africa now is how to keep on improving our thought system in order to be able to solve our contemporary challenges.

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4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cognitive psychology theory; 2. Science/Traditional Thought |
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End of Module Exercises

1. _____ posits that philosophizing in Africa will be more robust and thought provoking if the different cultures could come together in dialogue, in order to present a template for the evolution and reconstruction of ideas that pre-dominate African philosophy.
2. Azenarbo identifies _____ dimensions to humanism
3. Concerning African independence, pick the odd choice (a) Nyerere (b) Toure (c) Nkrumah (d) Babangida
4. _____ involves the dialectical relationship and unity between the traditional, Christian and Islamic Africa, in order to create a distinct form of the African personality
5. _____ teaches that thought develops from one stage to the other; from stage of the child, to the adolescent and to the adult

Ans.: Cognitive psychology