COURSE CODE: PHL 126

COURSE TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COURSE GUIDELINE – PHL 126: INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

Welcome **to PHL 126: Introduction to African Philosophy**. PHL 126 is a three-credit unit course that has minimum duration of one semester. It is a compulsory course for all first year B.A degree in philosophy students in the university. The course is expected to introduce the students to the rudiments of African philosophy. Through the course, students will come out with the impression that not only are there African philosophers, but also tradition of doing philosophy, even if not 'academic, in pre-colonial African societies. In the ultimate analysis, students will be introduced to some of the perennial, and oft peculiar, issues that animate the discipline of African philosophy.

Course Objectives

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

- Attempt a definition of African philosophy
- Mediate in the controversy over the nature and existence of African philosophy
- Discuss the various trends and currents in African philosophy
- Explain the history and historiography of African philosophy
- Discuss some of the substantive issues in African philosophy

Working through this Course

To successfully complete this course, read the study units, listen to the audios and videos, do all assessments, open the links and read, participate in discussion forums, read the recommended books and other materials provided, prepare your portfolios, and participate in the online facilitation.

Each study unit has introduction, intended learning outcomes, the main content, conclusion, summary and references/further readings. The introduction will tell you the expectations in the study unit. Read and note the intended learning outcomes (ILOs). The intended learning outcomes tell you what you should be able to do at the completion of each study unit. So, you can evaluate your learning at the end of each unit to ensure you have achieved the intended learning outcomes. To meet the intended learning outcomes, knowledge is presented in texts,

video and links arranged into modules and units. Click on the links as may be directed but where you are reading the text off line, you will have to copy and paste the link address into a browser. You can download the audios and videos to view off line. You can also print or download the texts and save in your computer or external drive. The conclusion gives you the theme of the knowledge you are taking away from the unit. Unit summaries are presented in downloadable audios and videos.

There are two main forms of assessments – formative and summative. The formative assessments will help you monitor your learning. This is presented as in-text questions, discussion forums and Self-Assessment Exercises.

The summative assessments would be used by the university to evaluate your academic performance. This will be given as Computer Based Test (CBT) which serves as continuous assessment and final examinations. A minimum of two or maximum of three computer-based tests will be given with only one final examination at the end of the semester. You are required to take all the computer based test and the final examinations.

Study Units

There are 24 study units in this course divided into five modules each. The modules and units are presented as follows:

Module 1
Unit 1: What is philosophy?
Unit 2: Two 'Senses' of philosophy: Academic and Worldview.
Unit 3: Colonialism and the emergence of philosophy education in Africa
Unit 4: Towards a Definition of African Philosophy

Module 2
Unit 1: The Great Rationality Debate
Unit 2: Eurocentrism, Ethnocentrism and Racism
Unit 3: Universalism and the Question of African Philosophy
Unit 4: Particularism and the Question of African Philosophy

Module 3

Unit 1: Ethnophilosophy

Unit 2: Sage Philosophy

Unit 3: Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy

Unit 4: Critical Current

Unit 5: Relevance School

Unit 6: The Conversational School of Philosophy

Module 4

Unit 1: The Nature of African History and Historiography

Unit 2: Historical Periodisation of African Philosophy

Unit 3: Key Historical Figures in African Philosophy

Unit 4: Some Controversies on Periodisation of African Philosophy

Module 5

Unit 1: Personhood

Unit 2: Cultural Identity

Unit 3: Freewill and Pre-Destination

Unit 4: Language Question in African Philosophy

Unit 5: Individual-Community Relationship in African Philosophy

Unit 6: Morality and Moral Values in African Philosophy

References and Further Readings

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Wiredu, K. (1980) *Philosophy and an African Culture.* Cambridge: CUP.

Wiredu, K. (1983) The Akan Concept of Mind", *Ibadan, Journal of Humanistic Studies*. No. 3. October.

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Presentation Schedule

The presentation schedule gives you the important dates for the completion of your computer-based tests, participation in forum discussions and participation at facilitation. Remember, you are to submit all your assignments at the appropriate time. You should guide against delays and plagiarisms in your work. Plagiarism is a criminal offence in academics and is highly penalized.

Assessment

There are two main forms of assessments in this course that will be scored. The Continuous Assessments and the final examination. The continuous assessment shall be in three-fold. **There will be two Computer Based Assessment. The computer-based assessments will be given in accordance to university academic calendar. The timing must be strictly adhered to.** The Computer Based Assessments shall be scored a maximum of 10% each, while your participation in discussion forums and your portfolio presentation shall be scored maximum of 10% if you meet 75% participation. Therefore, the maximum score for continuous assessment shall be 30% which shall form part of the final grade.

The final examination for PHL 126 will be maximum of three hours and it takes 70 percent of the total course grade. The examination will consist of 5 questions out of which you are expected to answer 4.

Note: You will earn 10% score if you meet a minimum of 75% participation in the course forum discussions and in your portfolios otherwise you will lose the 10% in your total score. You will be required to upload your portfolio using google Doc. What are you expected to do in your portfolio? Your portfolio should be note or jottings you made on each study unit and activities. This will include the time you spent on each unit or activity.

How to get the Most from the Course.

To get the most in this course, you need to have a personal laptop and internet facility. This will give you adequate opportunity to learn anywhere you are in the world. Use the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) to guide your self-study in the course. At the end of every unit, examine yourself with the ILOs and see if you have achieved what you need to achieve.

Carefully work through each unit and make your notes. Join the online real time facilitation as scheduled. Where you missed the scheduled online real time facilitation, go through the recorded facilitation session at your own free time. Each real time facilitation session will be video recorded and posted on the platform.

In addition to the real time facilitation, watch video and audio recorded summary in each unit. The video/audio summaries are directed to salient part in each unit. You can access the audio and videos by clicking on the links in the text or through the course page.

Work through all self-assessment exercises. Finally, obey the rules in the class.

Facilitation

You will receive online facilitation. The facilitation is learner-centred. The mode of facilitation shall be asynchronous. For the asynchronous facilitation, your facilitator will:

- Present the theme for the week;
- Direct and summarise forum discussions;
- Coordinate activities when need be;
- Upload scores into the university recommended platforms;
- Support you to learn. In this regard, personal mail may be sent.
- Send you videos and audio lectures; and podcast

For the Synchronous:

There will be a minimum of eight hours and a maximum of twelve online real time contact in the course. This will be through video conferencing in the Learning Management System. The

sessions are going to be run at an hour per session. At the end of each one-hour video conferencing, the video will be uploaded for view at your place.

The facilitator will concentrate on main themes that are must know in the course. The facilitator is to present the online real time video facilitation time table at the beginning of the course.

The facilitator will take you through the course guide in the first lecture at the start date of facilitation.

Do not hesitate to contact your facilitator. Contact your facilitator if you:

- do not understand any part of the study units or the assignment
- have difficulty with the self-assessment exercises
- have a question or problem with an assignment or with your tutor's comments on an assignment.

Also, use the contact provided for technical support.

Read assignments, participate in the forums and discussions. This gives you opportunity to socialize with others in the programme. You can raise any problem encountered during your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course facilitation, prepare a list of questions before the discussion session. You will learn a lot from participating actively in the discussions.

Finally, respond to the questionnaire. This will help the university to know your areas of challenges and how to improve on them for the review of the course materials and lectures.

Module 1

Unit 1: What is Philosophy?

Unit 2: Two 'Senses' of Philosophy: Academic and Worldview.

Unit 3: Colonialism and the Emergence of Philosophy Education in Africa

Unit 4: Towards a Definition of African Philosophy

UNIT 1:   WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

3.1   Definitional Problem of the Discipline of Philosophy

3.2   Etymological Analysis of the Concept of Philosophy

    3.2.1   *Philos*

    3.2.2   *Sophia*

    3.2.2   Some Definitions of Philosophy

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   References/Further Reading

1.0   Introduction

I wish to welcome you, once more, to the course, PHL 126 – Introduction to African Philosophy. Two things bear being pointed out to you from the title of this course: first, the course is a specialized one; it presumes that you already know what philosophy means and builds on this presumption to 'introduce' you to African specie of the former vocation. The second point has

been made implicitly in the previous two sentences. Namely, this course will only initiate you to the intellectual geography of the specialized discipline of African philosophy. As a consequence, the course aims to survey the whole territory of the discipline. However, in this primal unit, you will learn (or re-learn) what philosophy means. This task helps us to fulfil an important mission in the business of analysis of technical/complex concepts. Since African philosophy combines two concepts, it is only fair that you first acquaint yourself with the relevant concepts before you later on learn what the whole concept itself means (this will be done in a different study unit).

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit you would be able to:

- Attempt a definition of philosophy
- Grasp the etymological import of the concept of 'philo-sophia'
- Rehearse some common definitions of philosophy and appreciate why it is difficult to define philosophy

3.0   Main Content

3.1   Definitional Problem of the Discipline of Philosophy

The definition of philosophy has remained a perennial philosophical problem and there is little agreement as to what it is. Rather, what many seem to agree on is the description of philosophy; that is, what it encompasses which will provide the basis for our definition. There is even a sense in which we can rightly say that there are as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers. If this last sentence is true, it becomes necessary that one then say who a philosopher is; since the definition of the concept is purportedly explainable by the concrete instance of same.

Our question can now be re-stated thus: Who is a philosopher? To answer this latter question, a historical approach immediately suggests itself. What has typically been the pre-occupation of those men, and women, who historical writings, or traditions, have invariably tagged 'philosophers?' The approach to defining what philosophy means, and which is being currently

developed was originally 'developed' by a fairly recent philosopher, C. D. Broad (1963). To him, philosophy, really, is what philosophers do. Broad writes further that:

> If… we want to decide what philosophy is, we shall naturally begin by considering what kind of activities have been pursued by men (and women) whom everyone would regard as great philosophers when engaged in what everyone would regard as their characteristically professional work (p. 59).

What philosophers have historically always done is to critically re-think all the ideas, in various areas of human endeavors, that underlie individual human or group actions and practices. And, as just noted, these actions, and the ideas that lie beneath them, occur in *all* areas of human life – religious, political, cultural, legal, moral, educational, etc. Every human being, or group, acts in accordance with particular beliefs, or set(s) of beliefs. But many human beings do not check for the correctness, coherence and even meaning of these beliefs or ideas. Philosophers are therefore those men and women who make it their part or full time vocation the business of checking for the 'correctness, coherence and meaning' of the ideas that human beings live their lives by.

But precisely because philosophy does everything, it does nothing. And the reason for this apparent paradox ought to be obvious to you: philosophy has no specific range of affairs it superintends over; hence, individual philosophers are left to choose the subject, or set of subjects, to occupy them. Ultimately, the definition s/he is likely to give whatever emerges from such subjectively chosen subject(s) will differ from his/her colleagues' own. Here lies the definitional problem of philosophy. But you should not be deterred by this early set-back. As you probably might have learned from some other courses, philosophy may be defined etymologically. Let us now see how this is the case in the next sections.

3.2   Etymological Analysis of the Concept of Philosophy

At any rate, the concept, philosophy, was coined by an ancient Greek philosopher, Pythagoras of Samos (c. 570 – c. 495 BC). He is said to have coined the word from two words from his native Greek language; basically as a descriptive label to the brand of activities which, akin to the one you learnt in section 3.1., above, he and his fellow Greek thinkers engaged in.

3.2.1   *Philos*

In Greek, 'philos' means 'love.' Love is a relational concept. It is used to describe a state of affairs between at least two persons or entities. What this implies, with regards to the definition of philosophy, is that philosophers are people in a brand of relationship which can be perfectly exemplified with the love analogy. If this is true, you might now be wondering who, or what, philosophers are in love with? The answer to this will be found in 3.2.2., below.

3.2.2 *Sophia*

'Sophia' translates, from the Greek, as 'wisdom.' Wisdom refers to an insight or deep understanding of an event or life in general. Why such an 'insight' is sought after derives, primarily, from the fact that the universe human beings find themselves living in is quite a vast place. Added to this vastness is the more difficult fact of time. Modern science crudely estimates that the universe emerged approximately 14 billion years ago. Because human beings only exist in a tiny spatial and temporal fraction of the vast universe, it means they are is 'epistemologically closed' to its 'secrets.' Hence, an insight into the secrets of the universe, no matter how little, is not only much sought after, but is highly coveted when acquired. For ill or good reasons, however, not many human beings care for this sort of acquisition. On the definition of Pythagoras, philosophers are those men and women who quest after such insights or wisdom into the secrets of the universe. Their relationship with wisdom is such that it is best characterized as that of a person 'in love.'

3.2.2 **Some Definitions of Philosophy**

We can therefore, attempt a first definition of philosophy, emerging from the foregoing: philosophy is the love of wisdom. Here are some other definitions of philosophy:

- An attempt to understand the universe as a whole;
- An exploration of the place of will or consciousness in the universe;
- A critical examination of the source, scope and correctness of human beliefs and ideas

4.0 **Conclusion**

In this unit, you have learnt of the tough attempt at defining the discipline of philosophy. The difficulty at defining the discipline, notwithstanding, you learnt that a crucial virtue of a

philosopher is rigor in providing justification for all beliefs and constantly re-checking these 'justifications.'

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- the definitional problem of philosophy
- the etymological origin of the word, philosophy, from Greek and what it means via this means
- some common definitions of philosophy.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss the definitional problem of philosophy and conclude with your own personal definition of the discipline.

6.0   References/Further Reading

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Bodunrin, P.O. (1981) "The Question of African Philosophy", *Philosophy,* Vol. 56.

Broad, C. D. (1969). "Two Lectures on the Nature of Philosophy." In H. D. Lewis (ed.) *Clarity is not enough: Essays in Criticism of Linguistic Philosophy.* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Oladipo, Olusegun (2008) *Thinking about Philosophy: A General Guide.* Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Staniland, H. S. (1979). "What is Philosophy?" *Second Order,* 8:1&2

UNIT 2: TWO 'SENSES' OF PHILOSOPHY: ACADEMIC AND WORLDVIEW.

Contents

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will be further introduced into the discipline of philosophy. A quick remark would suffice now, emerging from the discussion in the previous section. If many people engaged in activities that merited the label of 'philosophy' before Pythagoras coined the word (and, indeed, if such people were dispersed in societies other than the Greek *poleis* Pythagoras was probably only familiar with), it means such people's works – written or otherwise – deserved proper study. Western philosophy, which came down from the Greek tradition of Pythagoras' intellectual successors would therefore do pretty well if such 'other' philosophies were studied. You should bear this last point in mind as it will serve as a main plank on which

some other important arguments will rest upon in latter units and modules of this course. In the meantime, though, you should be apprised, from this unit's study, of the two principal senses or manners philosophy may be used.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcome

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

- explain in what sense philosophy can be a kind of 'worldview'
- understand the academic or technical sense or usage of philosophy

3.0   Main Content

As earlier pointed out, philosophy can be used in at least two ways; though, not necessarily exclusive of one another. These two ways, or senses, are discussed below.

3.1   General Sense of Philosophy or Philosophy as 'Worldview'

In the broad or popular or general sense, philosophy means a way of life or a worldview held by an individual human agent or set of individuals. In this connection, you need to note that a worldview is a viewpoint or outlook of a person or group of persons about the origins, nature and scope of the world they inhabit.

Such worldviews help to furnish adherents with an understanding of the world they live in; the set of activities they can pursue and their own limitations therein. Worldviews are the lenses through which individuals view the world. And the bulk of these worldviews are already 'buried' in the religious, political, cultural, and other group-regulatory instruments, individuals make use of, whether consciously imbibed or not. All of these are very often described as philosophy, but in a general technical sense.

3.2   Technical or Academic Sense of Philosophy

In the technical or academic or strict sense, philosophy is a discipline people study in schools or as a profession they engage in whether as full time or part time vocation. Unlike the former, general sense of the concept, people who engage in philosophy in this latter sense do so from a self-conscious point of view. They devote a substantial portion of their lives to the examination and re-examination of 'received views' of the world and those who dwell in it; they also subject their own, and their colleagues' works to similar scrutiny. Invariably, philosophy, in this

technical or academic sense, is "a critical theory challenging prevailing description of ourselves and other situation and offering new descriptions" (Oladipo, 1999: 19).

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have examined the two senses the concept, philosophy, is used. These two senses, you would observe, are complementary. They will equally help you in later studies in this course to appraise traditional African ideas about life and how they can serve as crucial fodder for philosophical musings and reflections. The latter could also serve as important premises in refuting the claims of some people that Africans, before the commencement of philosophy departments in their tertiary institutions, never engaged in philosophizing.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- philosophy as a concept has two connotations. These connotations may be distinct, but complement each other
- philosophy, in the first connotation, is a form of worldview
- on the other hand, philosophy, like any other school subject or discipline, has its own unique contents, methodology and professional guild.

6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignments

Explain the two senses we use the word, philosophy

7.0   References/Further Readings

Blocker, Gene, (1987). "African Philosophy". *African Philosophical Inquiry,* 1:1

Bodunrin, P.O. (1981) "The Question of African Philosophy", *Philosophy,* Vol. 56.

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Staniland, H. S. (1979). "What is Philosophy?" *Second Order,* 8:1&2

UNIT 3:   COLONIALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF PHILOSOPHY EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcome

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    3.1   Factors Responsible for the Emergence of African Philosophy

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this study unit, we discuss the colonial background to contemporary African Philosophy. It should be noted that the colonial challenge is a major catalyst for the development of contemporary philosophy given the need by African intellectuals to reclaim their humanity in the face of European denigration of their personhood and cultural heritage. Emerging from this unit's study, you will be able to evaluate various derogatory and denigrating arguments of the European scholars with regard to the purported 'non-rationality' of the Africans. Such scholars

include, but not limited to, G. W. F. Hegel, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and many other anthropologists and ethnologists.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcome

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

- have an understanding of the age-old intellectual and physical subjugation of Africans, via colonialism and allied ideologies
- see the major role played by colonialism in the emergence of contemporary African philosophy.

3.0   Main Content

3.1   Factors Responsible for the Emergence of African Philosophy

There are several factors responsible for the emergence of contemporary African philosophy such as the challenge of development, identity, socio-economic emancipation, self-definition among others. All these factors are however ancillary to the *colonial factor.* The colonial factor played a vital role in the emergence of contemporary African philosophy itself. Its importance stems from the fact that the Eurocentric gaze on Africa questioned both the humanity and rationality of Africans. Hence, the various responses by African philosophers and non-African philosophers, such as Placid Tempels, to reclaim the humanity and rationality of Africans in the face of European denigration. A closer look at the colonial background will reveal succinctly that past and present pre-occupations of African philosophers are directed at proving the European gaze on Africa wrong or incorrect.

The African continent had a long encounter with Europe, starting off from slave trade, to missionary activities and then colonialism. It was during the period of colonization that the Europeans formally took total control over the governance of the Africans. The African continent was divided among European powers such as the British, Spanish, Portuguese and French. The Berlin conference of 1885 saw to the partitioning or of the African continent formally among the European powers mentioned above.

Armed with the ideology of oppression, suppression, assimilation and association, the Europeans treated the colonized 'others' as less than human and thus denied them of their humanity and rationality. These philosophies of oppression find so much expression and justification in the works of David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Hegel, Max Muller and even Karl Marx, a philosopher known to have developed the historical and dialectical materialism to free the oppressed people across the world.

According to Oladipo:

> "An integral aspect of the colonial enterprise, then, was to set up European culture as a standard against which all other cultures and forms of identity should be measured. (Oladipo, 2006:10).

It is not surprising then that various African scholars resolved to fight what Oladipo describes as "the invention of Africa by the colonialists" (Oladipo, 2006:10). A major attempt to fight the colonialists can be found in the attempt by early African intellectuals to provide several accounts, of African beliefs, values and cultural practices which showed that the Africans had a culture and that they were not barbaric.

Further demonstration of Eurocentric attitude is very conspicuous in the position of Lucien Levy-Bruhl and Friedrich Hegel. Levy-Bruhl, for instance, sees the African mind as pre-logical and a mind that does not follow the canons of European logic (Cazeneuve, 1972: 6 -20). Hegel, on his part, excludes the African continent from the movement of the Absolute Spirit. He believes that the Absolute Spirit is the European mind that is on its way to perfection. In this vein, Hegel justified the subjugation of the African continent by the Europeans. The Europeans scholars tended to undermine the validity of other cultures. This reason constituted the impetus for the propagation of all sorts of beliefs as African philosophy. These attempts are glaring in the works of Fr. Placid Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* (1959), John Mbiti's African *Religions and Philosophy* (1969), Bolaji Idowu's *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962) among others (Oyeshile, 1997: 41). There was also the political response through the works of Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Jomo Kenyatta.

The response to colonial denigration is just one aspect to the colonial background to contemporary African Philosophy. The second aspect to the colonial background has to do with

the challenge of development resulting from political freedom or the so-called 'political independence' from colonial powers. Given this factor, many African philosophers were concerned whether African Philosophy could respond effectively towards meeting the challenge of development bequeathed to new African leaders at Independence. It was not so easy a task to fashion out a role for philosophy as many of the early western trained African philosophers denied the existence of African philosophy, while some others asserted its existence. The major philosophers who believed that there wasn't African philosophy yet at this time include Paulin Houtondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Odera Oruka and Peter Bodunrin. These philosophers are said to belong to the modernist, Universalist or Analytic school of African philosophy. However, some of them later asserted that African philosophy existed and could be sifted from the so called 'ethno-philosophy'.

On the other hand, there was another school of thought that affirmed the existence of African philosophy and believed that traditional world views, regarding politics, morality, science, social and religious organizations depicted African's sense of rich philosophy and that appealing to these framework could help us to repair the damages inflicted on the African Psyche. Philosophers in this group include Alexis Kagame, Joseph Omoregbe, K. C. Anyanwu C. S. Momoh and Sophie Oluwole. It is interesting to note that this group known as traditionalists, particularists and the modernists and Universalists have reconciled their different positions and have been concerned with ways in which African philosophy could be at the service of Africans. In the subsequent chapters, due elaborations will be given to the defining features of contemporary African philosophy and the problems of defining African philosophy.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have examined the background to the emergence of African philosophy. this examination is important because of the several arguments and theories that Africans were base humans and could therefore not have a philosophy

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- Colonialism was not only a political exercise; it had an intellectual aspect whose subtlety makes it difficult to identify and eradicate.
- The diverse ills of colonialism played a huge part in the final emergence of contemporary African philosophy.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

1. What is the colonial challenge to the existence of African philosophy all about?
2. State the positions of any two European scholars concerning African culture
3. State some of the scholars that attempted to present the African worldview as African philosophy and their works.

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UNIT 4: TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0 Introduction

This unit examines the background to the challenges of having a viable definition of African philosophy. This task is germane given the fact that any adequate understanding of the issues in contemporary African philosophy must be based first on our understanding of the meaning of African philosophy itself, especially some of the controversies surrounding its history, perspectives and challenges. The unit concludes that African philosophy must encompass basic

attributes of philosophy such as reflection, conceptual analysis and criticism. Furthermore, these attributes stated above must be applied to African needs and ways of life.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcome

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

- know the controversies surrounding the definition of African Philosophy
- know the history and some challenges confronting the definitions and practice of African philosophy.
- know the major views of European philosophers concerning the denigration of African worldview
- know certain elements that are vital in the definition of African philosophy.

3.0   Main Content

According to Sogolo, "the controversy over what constitutes an African philosophy tends to dominate sometimes so much that it forms almost the entire content of the course" (1990:39). In this unit, the attempt is to say what African philosophy is, inspite of the seeming unending polemics in the sphere and practice of African philosophy.

3.1   Perspectives on African Philosophy

According to Paulin J. Hountondji, philosophy can be regarded as the most self-conscious of disciplines. It is the one discipline that involves by its very nature a constant process of reflection upon itself. The process of self-reflection inherent in the nature and practice of philosophy bears not only upon its purposes, objectives and methods, upon its relation to the world and to human experience in its multiple expressions, upon its status among other disciplines and forms of intellectual pursuit and discourse, but also, most radically upon its very nature as an activity and an enterprise. The view of philosophy as a critical activity whose function embraces an interrogation of its own nature and meaning is undoubtedly a legacy of the Greek philosophers (Hountondji, 1983:7). It is worth noting that African philosophy according to Hountondji, bears a direct relation to history and culture and that the reflection of African intelligentsia upon our total historical being represents a significant moment in the intellectual response of Africans to the challenge of western civilization (Hountondji, 11).

An attempt to define African philosophy can help in understanding philosophy itself. Philosophy can be defined and at the same time be described as the critical examination of the ideas which men live by (Staniland, 1979:8), such as the idea of justice, morality, political and religious ideas, even the idea of God, average men, perfect men and so forth. In this critical examination, the philosopher engages in conceptual analysis of the issues involved and in doing this, the philosopher has the tool of logic solidly at hand. When we talk of conceptual analysis, for instance, of the principle of induction, we are looking for the validity or otherwise of the universal claim made as a consequence of examining particular instances. The conceptual issue arises as a result of the fact that the instances examined in inductive argument are not exhaustive of all the classes involved. Hence, the philosopher is apt to reject the universality of the claim made.

3.2.   Towards a Definition of African Philosophy

Following from the above, one seems to be in a vantage position at answering out initial question: "what is African philosophy?" It is true that there are as many definitions of philosophy but it is possible, according to Staniland, to say that it is the critical examination of the ideas which men live by. In the same vein, it is a difficult task to give an accurate or faultless definition to African philosophy. However, be that as it may, we can recognize some essential ingredients about what philosophy is.

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

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have learned of the difficulty of giving a precise definition of African philosophy. It ought to be clear to you by now that this is a peculiar feature of the discipline of philosophy; univocal definitions are a rarity, if at all any can be found. But at least, you can attempt a brief description of what is done in the field of African philosophy.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- There are several perspectives to defining African philosophy
- African philosophy is an attempt by philosophers to make the folklores, myth, sooth sayings, religion, education, socio political organizations and other aspects of the African culture relevant to African needs not through any dogmatic attachment to standards used in evaluating the African culture or African culture itself, but through creative critical examination and logical methodologies which are not peculiar to the Western culture.

6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignments

What is African philosophy?

7.0   References/Further Studies

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Module 2

Unit 1: The Great Rationality Debate

Unit 2: Eurocentrism, Ethnocentrism and Racism

Unit 3: Universalism and the Question of African Philosophy

Unit 4: Particularism and the Question of African Philosophy

UNIT 1:   THE GREAT RATIONALITY DEBATE

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

3.1   Rationality, Philosophy and African Traditional Ideas.

3.2.   Views of European Scholars on the African Conception of Reality

3.3.   The Response of African Philosophers to the Eurocentric Views on the African Conception of Reality

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will learn of what has come to be called 'the Great Rationality Debate.' You will recall, from the previous module, that philosophy has been crudely described as the activity of using the human beings' innate gift of thinking to examine the circumstances surrounding them. It is important for you to note that the 'thinking' being referred to here is any activity that involves reflections and showing a positive disposition to understanding complex phenomena. Perhaps, only human beings think; and, hence, are rational. But what is clear is that individual human beings are not equally endowed with this gift of rationality. This probably explains why not all human beings elect to become professional philosophers. Granted this point, at least in the interim, is it also possible that some groups of people, and their practices and beliefs, are wholly less rational than others? In the early contact of Western anthropologists, philosophers, ethnologists and theologians with Africans, certain writers blatantly, perhaps scandalously, answered the preceding question in the affirmative. What you will now learn, in the rest of this unit, is the position of these writers and the challenge by other, mainly African, writers on them.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- attempt a definition of the concept of rationality
- expound on the arguments of some writers about the question of (ir)rationality of traditional African beliefs
- determine the plausibility, or otherwise, of these arguments especially in light of counters.

3.0   Main Content

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Many European scholars mostly anthropologists, ethnologists, theologians and even philosophers have attempted to give answers to what African traditional worldviews were through their theories on religions of the primitive people. Some of the European scholars are Emile Durkheim, Auguste Comte, James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Robert K. Malinowski, Max Muller, Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor, G. W. F. Hegel, David Hume and Levy Bruhl, among others. For instance, Levy Bruhl rejected the rationality of the primitive people and claimed that they were largely pre-logical and that what their practices point to is a kind of symbolism.

3.1   Rationality, Philosophy and African Traditional Ideas.

Rationality comes from the Latin word, *ratio*, which means reason. Reason is used as a stamp of quality of a special kind of thinking which involves making and drawing inferences from a phenomenon or set of phenomena. As a concept, therefore, rationality is used to refer to whatever follows reason. Reason, in turn, is "the capacity for consciously making sense of things, applying logic, establishing and verifying facts and changing or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs on new or existing information" (online 2019). In philosophy, being rational also invariably translates as being in conformity with the universal, and immutable, laws of thought. The laws of thought, discovered but not given, by Aristotle are as follows:

- ➢ *Law of Contradiction* – that a statement cannot be true and false at the same time
- ➢ *Law of Excluded Middle* – that every statement is either true or false
- ➢ *Law of Identity* – that if a statement is true, then it is true; in other words, each statement identical with itself (tautology, in more technical parlance).

In determining if any statement, or practice or belief, in any clime or epoch, passes the muster as meriting the coveted label of rational, thus, it must not violate any of these three laws. It is precisely this understanding that made many curious non-African observers of traditional African societies to test for the rationality of African traditional beliefs and ideas about life. Upon their 'observations,' bulk of them gave the verdict that Africans were irrational – or even 'pre-logical,' to employ Levy-Bruhl's own preferred terminology.

3.2. Views of European Scholars on the African Conception of Reality

There were various attempts to engage in the interpretation of religious worldviews of the so called primitive people by European scholars mostly anthropologists. According to Evans-

Pritchard, these theories are no more than plausible and even, as they have been propounded, unacceptable in that they contain contradictions and logical inadequacies, or in that they cannot be observed or proved true or false and because ethnographic evidence invalidates them all (Evans-Pritchard, 1965:18)

Max Muller in his own interpretation believes that things that are intangible like sun and the sky gave men the idea of the infinite and also furnished the material for deities. He did not wish to be understood as suggesting that religion began by men deifying grand natural objects, but rather these gave him a feeling of the infinite and also symbols for it. Muller was chiefly interested in the gods of India and of classical world, though he tried his hands at the interpretations of some primitive material and certainly believed that his explanations had general validity. His thesis was that the infinite, once the idea had arisen, could only be thought of in metaphor and symbol, which could be taken from what seemed majestic in the known world, such as the heavenly bodies, or rather their attributes. But these attributes then lost their original metaphorical sense and achieved autonomy by becoming personified as deities in their own right. So religion might be described as a 'disease of language', a pity but unfortunate expression. To him the only way we can discover the meaning of the religion of the early man is by philosophical and etymological research which restores to the names of gods and the stories told about their original sense (1965:21).

Herbert Spencer is of the belief that the primitive man is rational and given his small knowledge, his influences are reasonable, if weak. The primitive people had no idea of rational explanation as though they could have conducted their various practical pursuits without it. It is dreams which are real experiences to primitive peoples, which chiefly gave man the idea of his own duality, and he identified the dream – self which wanders at night with the shadow-self which appears by day. This idea of duality is fortified by experiences of various forms of temporary insensibility, sleeping, swooning, catalepsy and the like, so that death itself comes to be thought of as only a prolonged form of insensibility. And if man has a double, a soul by the same reasoning so must animals have one and also plants and material objects. The origin of religion however is to be looked for in the belief in ghosts rather than in souls. Spencer also believes that ancestor worship is the root of every religion (1965: 23-24).

Tylor stressed the idea of the soul rather than of ghost. Both the ghost theory and the soul theory might be regarded as two versions of a dream theory of the origin of religion. Primitive man then

transferred the idea of soul to other creatures in some ways like himself and even to inanimate objects which arouse his interest. The soul, being detachable from whatever it is lodged in, could be thought of as independent of its material home, whence arouse the idea of spiritual beings, whose supposed existence constituted Tylor's minimum definition of religion and these finally developed into gods, beings, vastly superior to man and in control of destiny. It should be noted that in the absence of possible means of knowing how the idea of soul and spirit originated and how they might have developed, a logical construction of the scholar's mind is posited on primitive man, and put forward as the explanation of his beliefs (1965: 25).

Durkheim in his sociological theory believes that religion is always a group, a collective affair and that there is no religion without a church. A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things that is to say, things, set apart forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite, into one single moral community called church, all those who adhere to them (1965: 57).

What Levy-Bruhl, means by pre-logical does not mean alogical or anti-logical. Pre-logical, applied to primitive mentality, means that it does not go out of its way as the Europeans do, to avoid contradiction. Levy-Bruhl was described as being too subtle, for he means by 'pre-logical' little more than unscientific or uncritical (1965: 82). Max Weber characterized society into three viz the rational, traditional and charismatic. He described the primitive society as a traditional one which is characterized by piety for what has always existed typical of conservative and relatively changeless societies in which effective or effectual sentiments predominate (1965: 117).

Accordingly, Pritchard opines that it is a remarkable fact that none of the anthropologists whose theories about the primitive religion have been most influential had ever been near a primitive people. They consequently had to rely for their information on what European explorers, missionaries, administrators and traders told them. Also there was the problem of interpretation. Their reports were inadequate and highly selective. He believes that statements about a people's religious belief must always be treated with great caution,

> "For the scholars are then dealing with what neither Europeans nor native can directly observe, with conceptions, images, words which require for understanding a thorough knowledge of a people's language and also awareness of the entire system of ideas which any particular belief is part, since it may be

meaningless when divorced from the set of beliefs and practices which belong to them" (1965: 7).

The selection on the level of bare observation had already produced an initial distortion. On the whole, they lacked any sense of historical criticism, the rules an historian applies when evaluating documentary evidence. Also the comparative method used was also a misnomer.

These writers on African culture tended to speculate what might have been the origin of some custom or belief, where there is absolutely no means of discovering, in the absence of historical evidence, what was its origin. And yet, this is what all the authors considered here explicitly or implicitly did, whether their theses were psychological or sociological. All their attempts fitted in very well with colonialist and other interest, and some were prepared to admit that some of the discredits must go the American ethnologist who wanted an excuse for slavery, and some also to those who desired to find the missing link between men and monkeys. Evans-Pritchard stressed that the first error of those theorists was the basing of interpretations on evolutionary assumptions for which no evidence was, or could be adduced. The second was that, besides being theories of psychological origins, their label of sociological could be said to rest ultimately on psychological suppositions. We should not interpret the thought of ancient or primitive people in terms of the European psychology; which has been moulded by a set of institutions different from theirs. Some of these writers even talked of the people they did not see. Pritchard concludes that the errors in theories purporting to account for primitive religions consist in demand for the logical analysis of their contents and testing of them against recorded ethnological fact in field research (1965: 101-102).

3.3. The Response of African Philosophers to the Eurocentric Views on the African Conception of Reality

The attempts at answering the Europeans of the charge that Africans were irrational by some of the scholars discussed above constituted the motif force for the propagation of all sorts of belief and ideologies as African philosophy. These attempts are glaring in the works of J. S. Mbiti *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969) and Fr. Placide Tempel's *Bantu Philosophy* (1959) to mention but a few.

The attempts by the anthropologists, psychologist and sociologist stated above do not in any way constitute the philosophy of the people they studied due to the shortcomings of such theories.

Hence, any attempt by any African scholars, African philosopher or any philosopher for that matter to present this kind of African worldview as constituting African philosophy will be anything but African philosophy. The above is what philosophy and African philosophy are not and cannot be.

Barry Hallen is of the opinion that since philosophy is not science, philosophers are not out to prove things true or false. Novel speculation, cogent argumentation and conceptual analysis are the centres of interest of philosophers. The most one can require is that speculation be empirically relevant, that it offers a new perspective on the human situation and the reality that it confronts. Philosophy has its own worldviews and if we only relate to traditional thought systems in terms of how they differ from or resemble the dominant worldview in western philosophy at the moment, we are throwing the baby out with the bath water (Hallen, 1977:89).

Barry Hallen states further that the worldview that prevails in much of academic philosophy today is a particular virulent and dogmatic form of empiricism. It is in an empiricism that can be traced to the ever increasing cultural predominance of contemporary science (which has in effect, exploited philosophy in the hope that it would produce suitably scientific ideology), and has led to a formidable series of recent 'schools', such as logical positivism, logical empiricism, ordinary language philosophy and even conceptual analysis. For one contriving preoccupation throughout has been that any term used to describe reality must either stand or fall purely on the level of 'empirical experience' (Hallen, 1977: 89-90). For Barry Hallen, therefore, contemporary analytic techniques are neither timeless nor acultural. The fact that they can afford interesting insights and comparisons is not sufficient reason to stop there. Other speculative, critical elements and standards of verification should be of equal importance if analysis (and philosophy) is itself to evolve, progress and perhaps even metamorphose. It cannot be contested that non-western cultures have a significant contribution to make in this regard (1977: 90).

4.0   Conclusion

You have now learnt of the rationality debate in African philosophy. You also learnt of the responses of African writers to the challenge posed by the early European scholars on the latter's verdict that traditional African beliefs and ideas were not rational.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- rationality is the capacity for consciously making sense of things, applying logic, establishing and verifying facts and changing or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs on new or existing information.
- meaning is relative to a particular 'life form.' Thus, the early European observers of African life-forms missed their mark in assessing them from their own restricted points of view.
- in order therefore to be able to determine properly whether a belief system is rational or not, it is important to first understand such a life form.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

i.   What are the three laws of thought, according to Aristotle?

ii.   Why do you think most European writers on African beliefs and practices came to the rather startling conclusion that they were irrational?

iii.   Using any African writer of your choice, how would you respond to the challenge posed by early European writers with respect to their position that traditional African ideas and beliefs were scarcely rational.

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UNIT 2: EUROCENTRISM, ETHNOCENTRISM AND RACISM

Contents

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1.0   Introduction

This unit builds on the discussion of the previous. It expounds on three concepts common to African studies. These are the concepts of racism, ethnocentrism and eurocentrism. One common thing to the three concepts is that they all have negative connotations. Because they are negative concepts, you will learn the importance of having keen eyes to identify and avoiding them.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- attempt a definition of the concept of racism
- define ethnocentrism
- know what eurocentrism means

3.0   Main Content

3.1   Racism

Racism is the belief in the superiority of races over one another. While the idea that human beings can be divided into several races is true, there are no conclusive proofs that any race is, or should be, superior to another and hence that the inferior race(s) should defer to the most superior one. Anyone who holds this belief that races are not equal in terms of their intellectual, aesthetic, endowments affirms racism and is a racist. Racism is a universal phenomenon but with respect to African philosophy, it was one of the principal inaugurators of the discipline, at least in contemporary times.

A number of 18th and 19th centuries European philosophers were racists. Some of them are David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Georg W. F. Hegel. These 'great philosophers' made some infamous statements about black Africans. Consider Hume in the following passage:

> *"I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white; nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient GERMANS, the TARTARS, have still something about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of which none ever discovered any symptom of ingenuity; tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly"* (Hume, 1758, 125n).

It is easy to see, from Hume's words, how bigoted and prejudiced he is. His statements, obviously, was not based on any experimental reasoning. Just racial/complexion. Even when he concedes some 'eminence' to Africans, he says such emanated from Africans acting/pretending like Europeans. Hegel and Kant, like Hume, were as condescending of Africans. The upshot of racist ideas culminated in Europe's eventual slave trade, colonialism and other exploitative ventures on Africans – apparently, on the pretext of 'civilizing' African 'natives' who, in the words of Rudyard Kipling, were "half-devil and half-child."

3.2   Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the view that one's culture is the model after which other cultures ought to conform. Put in other words, ethnocentrists believe, rightly or wrongly, in the prima facie superiority of their own culture vis-à-vis other people's. What this definition points up is that

ethnocentrists acknowledge cultural differences; s/he also reckons the subsistence of other cultures, whether in his/her own milieu or outside it. Not infrequently, however, an ethnocentrist measures other cultures by the standard of her/his own. You might want to ask, at this point, how ethnocentrism differs from racism. The answer to your question is that racism is a narrower version of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrists, in other words are racists – at least, to the extent that they rank their own particular culture above others'. Where an ethnocentrist often differs from a racist is that s/he may not discriminate against others from other cultures; only that s/he thinks that her/his culture is better than others' invariably, and on this showing, a racist will be ethnocentrist but not always the other way around.

3.3   Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism is the idea that European or Western civilization is superior to every other ones. Eurocentrists, in other words, and like ethnocentrists, judge other people's culture against the 'standard' of their own 'model' European or Western culture. What this clearly implies is that eurocentrism is a specie of ethnocentrism. Like ethnocentrists again, eurocentrists are sometimes racists, too. In the colonial era, especially in French and Portuguese colonies, you will readily witness, in a palpable manner, how this Eurocentric idea played out in the public policies of the colonialists vis-à-vis the 'natives.' For instance, in the policies of Assimilation and Assimilado, by the French and Portuguese, respectively, we saw the blatant efforts of the European colonial officers to create what they called Black French people and Black Portuguese people. Indeed, there was a social classification of Africans into citizens (evolues, assimilados, etc) and natives with the former being those Africans who had adopted, in entirety the European mode of life. The obvious motivation here being the arrogant belief of these Eurocentric officials to think that their own culture was superior to the Africans'.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have learnt the meaning of three popular concepts which are relevant to any philosophical studies of African traditional beliefs and practices.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- racism is an idea that holds that some races are inferior while one or the other race is superior to the others.
- Ethnocentrism, though milder, is the belief that one's culture is more superior to other
- Related to both racism and ethnocentrism is eurocentrism which particularly favors only European cultures over all other ones.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

Attempt an exposition of the concepts of racism, ethnocentrism and eurocentrism taking time to show their differences and, if any, similarities.

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 3:   UNIVERSALISM AND THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

The discussions that follows in this section and the next one belong to the same genre: namely, how should we characterize African philosophy? Are its features peculiar or do they, and ought they to, conform to certain universal preconditions? Either way, what are these peculiar or universal preconditions? A careful study of the materials in these two lecture units will fetch you more or less plausible answers to the foregoing questions.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Give alternative names to the universalist position in African philosophy
- Expound on the arguments of the proponents of universalism
- Identify possible shortcomings of universalism.

3.0   Main Content

The universalist position is also known as modernism or neo-logical positivism. Notable members of this school are P. O. Bodunrin, Kwasi wiredu, H. O. Oruka and Paulin J. Hountondji. Universalists assert that philosophy is like every other discipline – complete with its own *universal* methodology, concepts and problems – in short, 'paradigm – from where students work from.

The universalist school, which is of the analytic bent, emphasizes the present in relation to the future. To this group, African philosophy should be pursued in the light of modernization through science and technology which are the most useful axioms for development. The method of this group is akin to that of the western philosophers which is characterized by freedom of inquiry, openness to criticism, skepticism and fallibilism and non-veneration of authorities. This group believes that Western scientific and philosophical categories should be used in the study of African traditional culture which is largely dominated by intense religiosity, spiritism, authoritarianism and superstition (1985: XI-XII). It is worth noting however that the two groups identified above are strange bed fellows for they constantly charge one another of being unphilosophical or un-African.

Gene Blocker also believes that African philosophy must utilize the traditional tools of philosophical analysis to clarify and offer solutions to social and political problems of contemporary West Africa. He stated further that African philosophy has no particular style but several prominent features. The most dominant feature according to him is social-political and ethical. He concludes that West African philosophers are striving to reshape their human affairs and we are thus brought close to the optimism of Plato and Aristotle attempting to rebuild society from the ground on the basis of philosophical reflection (Blocker, 1987:7).

Philosophy, according to Wiredu, should not be academic and technical because it can lose its quality of being relevant to the need of the people. On the other hand, he says that technicality and high degree of complexity are inevitable in any serious and sustained philosophical inquiry. There seems to be a dilemma in this view. However, Professor Wiredu insists that for African philosophy to be useful we cannot run away from rigour in analysis and criticism. He is of the view that African philosophy, as distinct from African traditional world-views, is the philosophy that is being produced by contemporary African philosophers, which to him is still very much in the making (Wiredu, 1980: 16-36).

In his article "The Questions of African Philosophy," Peter Bodunrin referred to Odera Oruka as identifying four trends that are supposed to constitute African philosophy. The first is Ethno-philosophy, which largely consists of the collective world-views of Africans, their folklores, myths and so forth. Other trends include Philosophic sagacity which is exemplified in Marcel Griaule's conversation with Ogotemmeli; Nationalist ideological philosophy which is exemplified in the works of African political thinkers such as Nkurumah and Nyerere. The last of the trends is Professional Philosophy which is believed to be what is practiced by contemporary African philosophers in African universities (Bodunrin, 1984:1-2).

To Bodunrin, the type of philosophy being expounded by African philosophers in the African universities, which is characterized by rigour in analysis and criticism of African cultural beliefs and those issues that affect the African society, is what could be said to be African philosophy. All the trends in African philosophy are attempts to meet the challenges facing the African continent. The challenges range from the accusation that Africans are irrational and non-logical in thought, as argued by European anthropologists and clergymen, for example, Levy-Bruhl. Another challenge was necessitated by the so-called African nationalism and the need for a stable polity as a consequence of the many African states. There is also the challenge of

comparison, which consists of finding African equivalence of Plato and Aristotle and lastly the issue of providing an adequate philosophical world-view to meet the challenge of contemporary global development.

4.0   Conclusion

The focus in this unit has been to expose the position of those scholars that have been tagged universalists. Universalists, it was pointed out in this unit, have a global conception of their discipline. They insist that African philosophy, if it must be taken a serious academic venture, must conform to global standards in terms of its contents, focus and methodology.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- An awareness of the fact that the controversy over the meaning of African philosophy yet remains
- Universalism has several other synonyms – modernism, neo-logical positivism, etc
- Universalists believe, rightly or wrongly, that there is global conception of the discipline of philosophy, and to which every other dub-branch must conform'

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

Write a brief note on universalism vis-à-vis African philosophy

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 4: PARTICULARISM AND THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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1.0   Introduction

In the previous unit, you have examined the universalist position on the nature of African philosophy. But in this unit, you would be examining the other half of that coin; that is, particularism. As you will soon find out, particularism is a contrastive position to universalism. What you will basically learn in this unit is an understanding of the arguments of the particularists vis-à-vis African philosophy.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Give alternative names to the particularist position in African philosophy
- Expound on the arguments of the proponents of particularism
- Identify possible shortcomings of particularism

3.0   Main Content

Alternatively known as traditionalism and cultural purism, particularism has proponents in philosophers like C. S. Momoh, Joseph Omoregbe, K. C. Anyanwu and S. B. Oluwole. According to them, philosophy is a product of culture – even if it seeks to influence and shape it. To Joseph Omoregbe, **African philosophy encompasses the traditional African thought such as myths, wise sayings, folklores and the contemporary works of African philosophers trained in Western philosophical tradition which deal with evaluation and analysis of contemporary issues agitating the African mind such as African socio-political philosophy** (Omoregbe, 1985:10). Peter Bodunrin is of the view that what philosophical arguments do is to compel us to make a choice since we cannot live with inconsistent beliefs. On African philosophy, extra philosophical considerations account for the divergent views which African philosophers hold. These considerations all have something to do with anti-colonialist and post-

colonialist intellectual liberation. Professor Bodunrin accordingly distinguishes two groups of African philosophers on what African philosophy is. The first group known as the traditionalists emphasize the present in relation to the past. Their concern is the discovery of authentic African ideas and thought systems uninfluenced by alien accretions. This group thinks that the crisis of identity in which Africa is enmeshed is because Africa has lost its roots. The materials of this group include African myth, folklore, social organization and oral literature and culture. This group, according to Professor Bodunrin, had hitherto been referred to as ethno-philosophers but the name has been dropped because of its pejorative connotation and for the fact that this group now carries out its discussion with greater analytic rigour and less dogmatism than previously (Bodunrin, 1985: XI).

A point that is worth noting is that all the African philosophers and European philosophers unequivocally agree that the traditional belief system of the African people is an integral part of African philosophy. Probably, the major task in African philosophy has to do with the methodology of carrying out African philosophy. In the words of K. C. Anyanwu, "philosophers are looking for knowledge, truth and value not in a vacuum but in a given social historical context, and their knowledge of reality has tended to reinforce or retard the socio-historical process of a period" (1981:4). If the above statement by Dr. Anyanwu is correct, then African philosophy should have as its focus such issues that will tend to ameliorate the sufferings of the African people. And here one may be tempted to say that the attempts at constructing ethno philosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist ideological philosophy and professional philosophy will be inadequate to the extent that they do not accord with the existential needs of the Africans which they attempt to represent. In other words, African philosophy should be such that is dynamic in content since the existential imports of the Africans change from time to time.

In his article "Options in African Philosophy", which is similar to what Kant did in modern philosophy as regards the rationalist and empiricist controversy, Sogolo is of the view that professional African philosophers present a double faced appearance, one in fulfillment of their professional calling and the other, perhaps, adapted to social and material pay-offs. This dilemma identified above has made some African professional philosophers to engage in intelligent expression of ignorance, insincerity and clear abuse of erudition which are hardly noticed by the ordinary mind. He opines that the issue of whether or not there is African philosophy gives the

uncomfortable impression that the question itself is what African philosophy is (Sogolo, 1990: 40-41).

Some philosophers in their bid to protect continuity in their professional callings shut the door against alternative conceptions thereby leaving aside the realities of change in modern society. Though Sogolo strictures African oral tradition as constituting philosophy compared with the European culture characterized by continuity and utility, he nevertheless believes that some category of African philosophers has so much been given to western style of philosophizing, consisting mainly of analysis, that these philosophers have tended to apply this analytic method to anything called philosophy whether African or otherwise. By so doing they are not helping the growth of philosophical knowledge since the method is biased towards the western. In the words of Professor Sogolo "this is the kind of cultural divergence African philosophers of my first category are seeking to overcome" (Sogolo, 1990: 49). On another level, Sogolo believes that other group of philosophers whose cultural outlook is still basically African posits anything as African philosophy without any critical analysis like equating the rationality and wiseness of animals with that of men (Sogolo, 1990: 50).

Sogolo therefore calls for a philosophy, which will be uniquely African in content and methodology. He calls for cultural relevance. For the start one may use some descriptive accounts of the raw ingredients of thought beliefs, folk wisdom, worldview etc, which though necessary, are no more than rudiments yielding philosophical questions. This is the new orientation he proposes in studying African philosophy. According to him 'it is therefore an orientation that puts one foot ahead of ethno-philosophy and the other beside professionalism by way of domestication" (1990: 51). By this way, African philosophy becomes more relevant culturally and professionally (1990: 5).

In this way, one can say that Sogolo in a surgical way, has tried to overcome the shortcomings of the main rival schools of thought in African philosophy, viz., the traditionalists who seem to be very much in love with ethno philosophy and the modernists who are of the western analytic frame of mind. It is only through this way that major problems confronting the African culture and people can be solved. By this method too, the pre-occupation of African philosophers would not only be relevant to the socio-historical context of the Africans, but would at the same time be meaningful to others outside the African culture whether they embrace it or not.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have learnt the position of particularism, especially as it relates to the character of African philosophy. You also learnt the alternative names of particularism and how his identity.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- particularism has several other synonyms – traditionalism and cultural purism
- Particularists believe, rightly or wrongly, that there is global conception of the discipline of philosophy, and to which every other sub-branch must conform'

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

Write a brief note on particularism vis-à-vis African philosophy

7.0   References/Further Readings

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Module 3

Unit 1: Ethnophilosophy

Unit 2: Sage Philosophy

UNIT 1:   ETHNOPHILOSOPHY

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1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will be introduced to the first major current in African philosophy. African philosophy is still shrouded in a number of controversies, as you would have seen in the two previous modules and study units. These controversies revolve around the issue of methodology. The primal question that seems to animate discussions in this topic is this: granted that there is an African philosophy, how should it done and what should be its character and contents? The answer ethnophilosophers give to this question is that indigenous belief systems of African societies should be the basis of African philosophy. You will learn the meaning of ethnophilosophy in this unit. You will also learn of some of the important short comings of the current.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- define ethnophilosophy
- understand the background to the term 'ethnophilosophy'
- identify notable ethnophilosophers and their positions on African philosophy
- mention some shortcomings of ethnophilosophy

3.0   Main Content

Ethnophilosophy is one of the popular currents in African philosophy. As a concept, it was coined by Paulin Hountondji in his book, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983). It suffices for you to note that this term, 'ethnophilosophy,' has a derogatory meaning. Hountondji and others who popularized it wished to cast doubts on the philosophical merits of the works of its principal exponents; indeed, the exponents of ethnophilosophy think they were doing legitimate philosophy and so never – at least, initially, labelled their works as *ethnophilosophical.*

Emerging from the foregoing, you may now wish to ask: Why Ethnophilosophy? What is ethnophilosophy? Who are ethnophilosophers? These, and other questions are what you will now be given answers to shortly. Firstly, ethnophilosophers are those group of scholars (philosophers) in the field of African philosophy who believe that an indigenous/original body of philosophical knowledge can, and ought to, be gotten from indigenous African cultural practices and belief systems. To them, traditional African proverbs, songs, myths, stories, spiritualisms, religions, and so on, have deep philosophical imports – in all of the latter's branches. And hence, the task of the African philosopher is to bring to the daylight these hitherto buried ideas for prompt systematization and popularization before a more modern and broader audience.

The motivation for ethnophilosophy, you need to note, is the quest for authenticity. It is believed by its chief exponents that African culture should be free from all western and foreign accretions. Even if the concerned 'natives' are not aware of the word 'philosophy,' their actions and belief systems already embody one. To therefore deny them of having philosophies is tantamount to denying their very humanity. By implication, the task of the educated (in the Western sense) African philosopher is to bring out these philosophical assumptions of their people.

Some notable ethnophilosophers include the Belgian priest, Fr. Placide Tempels, Alexis Kagame, Geoffrey Parrinder, Bolaji Idowu, J. O. Awolalu, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Omotade

Adegbindin, and many others. Starting with Placide Tempels who worked on *Bantu Philosophy*, ethnophilosophers opine that Africans do philosophy in all their daily lives. These philosophies can be gleaned from their worldviews and other cultural practices. Senghor's position, like Tempels', is that African epistemology (you should note that epistemology or theory of knowledge is a major branch of philosophy) is radically different from the West's. Whereas the former is based on 'reason,' the African's is based on 'emotion. Because of this, Senghor's verdict is that African philosophy, if done from this (ethnophilosophical) standpoint, does not acknowledge many of the problems in the dominant Western philosophy.

It is true, in concession to ethnophilosophers, that all philosophies are culture bound. Bertrand Russell (1996) famously reminds us of this connection between culture (people's lived experiences/history) and philosophy in the passage below:

> *"Ever since men have been living, their actions, in innumerable have been guided by their philosophies. To understand an age or a nation, we must understand its philosophy and to understand its history (or culture), we must ourselves be philosophers… (for) the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy…" (p. ix).*

But this notwithstanding, some problems remain with ethnophilosophy. These criticisms, to be sure, were mainly levelled by its denigrators like Hountondji, Wole Soyinka, Kwasi Wiredu, and many other. First is the charge of unanimism. Ethnophilosophers think all Africans thought in the same way; that there are no variations in their thinking. The whole idea of pitting African thought against Western thought may also be counterproductive as it only serves to reinforce the argument of Eurocentric and other racist scholars who hold, wrongly, that Africans are inferior to Europeans.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have learnt of the first major current in the discipline of African philosophy. You learnt the meaning of ethnophilosophy, its origin, and motivation. You also learnt of its shortcomings.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- Ethnophilosophy is one of the opposing trends or currents in African philosophy. Its proponents believe that the model for doing African philosophy is the ideal one.
- As a term, the word ethnophilosophy has a negative connotation. Although its proponents later accepted that label, it was suggested by one of their chief critics, P. Hountondji.
- Ethnophilosophers believe that culture and philosophy are inseparable and it is the responsibility of the African philosopher to acquaint him or herself with it in order to be able to extract its philosophical imports.
- Ethnophilosophy has a number of shortcomings among which are unanimism and essentialism.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

i.   What is ethnophilosophy?

ii.   Identify some of its shortcomings and react to these shortcomings.

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 2: SAGE PHILOSOPHY

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7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In the previous unit, you have learned of the first current in African philosophy. In this unit, you will continue on this note. But your focus here will be on another trend or current in African philosophy. As you will soon find out, the whole position of sage philosophy is quite similar to ethnophilosophy in that it draws its main inspiration from traditional African past. What you will be doing in this unit is quite straightforward: you will first learn of the meaning of sage philosophy. After this, you will become aware of the motivation behind it. This second task will quickly lead you to the third where you will learn of its tasks and finally, its merits and demerits, if any.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- define who a sage is
- explain the focus and programme of the sage current in African philosophy
- understand the motivation behind sage philosophy
- identify the achievements and shortcomings of sage philosophy

3.0   Main Content

A sage, as defined by the editors of the *English Dictionary* (2006), is any person who is "wise through reflection and experience" (p. 368). What this lexicographical analysis of a sage quickly suggests is that a sage is an individual person; but not all individuals are sagacious. It goes in line with the position that philosophers are humans but we normally don't (at least, in a strict sense) in which we differentiate between sages and philosophers, for you to note is that sages are 'unwilling philosopher.' We say 'unwilling' because sages are, firstly, not career philosophers – whether in training or in practice – and say or write are quite witty that had you not been told of their identities, you would regard them as philosophers.

Another thing you need to note about sages is that they are 'loners' in the societies where they live; they usually do not subscribe to the same philosophical beliefs floating around in their societies. This, even while it is probably true that a society's cultural norms and practices have philosophical imports, sages are those men or women who are wise enough to be sceptical of these traditions or any new ones in order to evaluate them in a dispassionate manner. They are able to come up with their own positions on diverse spheres of their lived experiences – either these are in tandem with the rest of the members of their societies or not.

Now, Henry Odera Oruka, the Kenyan philosopher, was the first to the popularise this method of doing African philosophy. His main motivation for doing this derives, in part, from some of the criticisms of ethnophilosophy. The chief criticism here is that of unanimism; the charge that ethnophilosophy amounts, in reality, to folk or collective philosophy. To these critics, philosophy qua philosophy is an individual venture. It is also adversarial and reflective, etc. And, to them, ethnophilosophers failed in all, or at least most, of their ingredients of a genuinely philosophical work. It was a way of responding to this charge that exponents of sage philosophy, led by Oruka, sought to show that traditional Africa had her own fair number of sagacious thinkers.

Late professor H. O. Oruka, the first to popularise this current or trend holds that the task of the literate, Western-educated professional scholar is to go on field trips to indigenous African communities that are quite free of Western civilization and development and seek-out these sagacious men and women. These sages are to be interviewed and their thoughts documented. In adopting this approach, Oruka and co believe that an authentically African philosophy, that can

rival any other world philosophy, will be achieved. Marcel Griaule's works on Dogon (especially, Ogotemmeli) sages of Burkina-Faso also qualifies as belonging to this genre. J .O. Sodipo and Barry Hallen, his American collaborator, also worked on some Yoruba *onisegun* whose insights on the epistemological concepts of knowledge and belief.

Among the several criticisms that have been levelled on Sage philosophy by critics is the philosophical purity of the thoughts of the so-called sages. It is asked by critics: to what extent will the interviewer metropolitan scholar not put words into the mouths of his/her interviewee native sages? And to what extent are these sages immune from metropolitan views in today's ever closer world? The implication of these queries is to cast doubts on the originality of the thoughts of the sages. Other criticisms of sage philosophy was by P. O. Bodunrin. Bodunrin suggests that it is one thing to have sages in Africa and it is another matter to insist, as Oruka and company apparently do, that there were philosophers in traditional Africa who carried out independent works of philosophy in these societies. Thus, Bodunrin thinks the exponents of sage philosophy have confused one for the other; and while the first point is hardly contestable, the other is.

4.0   Conclusion

In the unit, you have examined another current in African philosophy – sage philosophy. You have also learnt the details of this position with respect to the character of African philosophy. If you read through the material again, you will be able to connect it with those of the previous and upcoming units of this module.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- a sage is a wise man or woman and such people are found in every society.
- sage philosophy was crafted by Oruka who wanted to respond to some of the challenges of ethnophilosophy.
- Oruka and company's works on sage philosophy showed that there were sages in traditional Africa whose thoughts qualify as philosophical
- sage philosophy has a number of demerits which include the question of originality and that of content.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

  i.   What is sage philosophy?

 ii.   What are some of the problems associated with the sage philosophical current in African philosophy?

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 3: NATIONALIST-IDEOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Contents

Contents

1.0   Introduction

Here, you will learn of the third of the five currents in contemporary African philosophy. This is the Nationalist-Ideological current. Alongside the ethnophilosophical and sage philosophical currents, the Nationalist-Ideological current is based on traditional African ideas and cultures as basis for drawing philosophical theories. But there are remarkable differences between Nationalist-Ideological current and the former two in what its exponents think should be the character of African philosophy. All these, and more, will be your pre-occupation in the rest of this lecture unit.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit you would be able to:

- define Nationalist-Ideological philosophy
- discuss the position of Nationalist-Ideological philosophers on the character and goal of African philosophy.

- point out the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments of Nationalist-Ideological philosophers.

3.0   Main Content

According to Ovett Nwosimiri (2017), Nationalist-Ideological current in African philosophy "emanates from the ideologies of national liberation movements" (p. 2). What this entails is that the Nationalist-Ideological current has a dominant goal: political liberation and administration of African states. You may now wish to ask, and rightly so: why this motif of liberation and administration? Isn't the existing order ideological already? The answer to your first question will be found in the fact – in case you have forgotten – that modern African states, with the arguable exception of Ethiopia, were all colonized or ruled by foreign, mainly European, powers from about 500 years ago till the latter part of the last century. And you probably know already by now that the first precondition of human flourishing or development is freedom. Hence, while colonialism lasted on the African continent, the chances of the people being able to flourish or develop, in all the spheres of the latter, was slim, if not even non-existent.

Before the advent of colonialism in Africa, especially from the post-Berlin conference of 1884-1885, several independent empires, kingdoms and chiefdoms dominated virtually all parts of the continent. Because the governments of these states were 'personal' to the concerned peoples, progress and development, even if minute in comparative terms to those of Europe, were assured. All this was put to stop, even reversal, with the advent of the slave trade, colonialism and imperialism. Thus, Africans, since the early to the hey days of colonialism, have always sought to overthrow such inhibitory and unprogressive social orders. The Nationalist-Ideological project is a way out of the former quagmire.

The Nationalist-Ideological project was in several phases, you need to bear in mind. First, was the phase of political liberation of African states from colonial rule. This has been largely achieved as virtually all parts of Africa are now under 'national' governments. The anti-colonial phase of the Nationalist-Ideological project was chiefly driven by early nationalist leaders in the various states of Africa – Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and several others. According to Nkrumah, for instance, "Seek ye first the political kingdom" and everything else will fall into place.

After the attainment of political independence, what natural obtains is administration of such 'liberated' states. This is no mean task. According to Nationalist-Ideological philosophers, the ideas for administering or governing these states are to be gotten from pre-colonial era African states. By implication, these thinkers are of the view that modern theories of government, development and social justice like Marxism and capitalism, which derive from the erstwhile European colonial states, are not fitting for Africa. In short, they wish to 'return' to the past which was, for some of them, a utopia. You might be quick to press, at this juncture, if this latter phase of the Nationalist-Ideological project is achievable even if ideal and realistic. You will get a chance to answer these questions later, but in the meantime, let us discuss the nature of Nationalist-Ideological philosophy.

Going back to Nwosimiri again, Nationalist-Ideological philosophy is "a social synthesis of contemporary African reality and African social values" (p. 3). The 'contemporary African reality' being spoken of here by Nwosimiri are the economic, cultural, political and religious ones. The modern African is caught in web of sorts on these life-shaping phenomena. On the one, one seems to think that there were definitive African voices on these subjects in the past; and there are competing ones from elsewhere. Nationalist-Ideological philosophy aims to put forward a yardstick for crafting a suitable mix of these competing ideas and values by tapping into the 'soul' of Africa for inspiration. Among the diverse proposals that have been advanced by Nationalist-Ideological philosophers are theories like consciencism, developed by Nkrumah of Ghana, which holds an egalitarian and humanistic ethic (Nkrumah, 1970, p. 79); communalism which is based on pre-colonial African setting that views human beings as intricately bound up in the destiny of their community (Makumba, 2007, p. 140); Negritude, developed by Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, which asserts a philosophy of 'difference' of Africans vis-à-vis others, and that Africans should be proud of this fact (Senghor, 2001, p. 144); Pan-Africanism, which seeks to create a homeland for all human beings of the black race (Makumba, 2007, p. 147).

While it is praiseworthy the attempts by Nationalist-Ideological philosophers to struggle for decolonization of Africa, certain loopholes lurk within their project. First, they overglorify the African past as if it had no problems of its which therefore taints any ambitious project of return to such 'glorious' pasts. For instance, proponents are mute on the complicity of some of the leaders of pre-colonial African states in the trans-Atlantic sale and subsequent shipment of their

fellow Africans. You might say, a 'perfect' society would not condone such practices. Of course, there are records of African individuals and leaders, in the slave-trade era, who fought these things, incontrovertible evidences abound of many other complicit ones. Besides, in light of the multi-ethnic configurations of virtually all contemporary states of Africa, Nationalist-Ideological philosophers do not pay enough attention to the sheer difficulty of adopting the framework of any nation over those of others, even within the same state.

4.0   Conclusion

This unit has shown you another current in African philosophy. You learnt of the meaning, focus, concern and evaluation of the claims of Nationalist-Ideological current in African philosophy. You are now armed with further information and are in a better position to participate in these debates.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this study unit:
- nationalist-ideological philosophy has two broad ambitions
- first, it aims to help liberate African states from the shackles of colonialism
- second, nationalist-ideological philosophers are of the view that pre-colonial era African societies possessed the relevant ideas of governance which, if adopted by modern African states, will guarantee the latter's development.
- consciencism, pan-africanism, communalism, negritude are some of the diverse ideologies in the armory of the Nationalist-Ideological current
- the independence-status of virtually all modern states of Africa remains the most obvious testament of the success of the nationalist-ideological project
- proponents of nationalist-ideological need to answer some pressing question bordering on how realistic it is their ambition to return Africa to a dubiously glorious past.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments
  i.   What is the mission statement of the Nationalist-Ideological current.
 ii.   Are there any weaknesses and strengths in the position of the exponents of Nationalist-Ideological philosophy.

7.0   References/Further Readings

Makumba, P. M. (2007). *Introduction to African Philosophy.* Nairobi: Pauline Publications

Nkrumah, K. (1970). *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution.* London: Panaf Books.

Nwosimiri, Ovett (2017) "Do the Works of the Nationalist-Ideological Philosophers Undermine Hume's and Kant's Ideas About Race?" *SAGE Open Journal* DOI: 10.1177/215824401770068 https://www.journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo pp. 1 – 11.

Senghor, L. S. (2001). "Negritude and Modernity or Negritude as a Humanism for the Twentieth Century." In R. Bernasconi (Ed.) *Race*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 143-165.

UNIT 4: CRITICAL CURRENT

Contents

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
3.0   Main Content
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary
6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments
7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, and the next two, you will learn of some other currents in African philosophy. Unlike the three previous ones, the critical current, as you will see from its name, is indeed quite critical. It is critical of these other currents and even of itself. You will then see why the critical current is truly interesting. Recall that you learnt, in the second module of this course material – specifically in that module's units three and four – of the universalist and particularist orientations in African philosophy. It bears being pointed out that you see the critical current as sharing much affinity with the former orientation. In the rest of this unit, therefore, you will learn the details of the critical current's position on African philosophy. You will also learn of some of its common personages as well as an evaluation of this current

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Explain the critical current in African philosophy and its affinity with universalist orientation in the same philosophy.
- Identify the common personalities in this current
- Evaluate the position of the critical current with respect to African philosophy

3.0   Main Content

The critical current in African philosophy emerged recently. Members of this current are the early crop of African scholars, and their students, who received their trainings in European and American universities' departments of philosophy. You need to note, though, that it is not the case that all Western educated philosophers are members of this current. However, there are no Non-Western-educated philosophers in the current. It might be legitimate for you to speculate that there is probably a necessary connection between being trained in the Western academy and being a critical theorist in African philosophy but this will be tenuous since there are no conclusive proofs to that effect.

The critical theorists are intellectual purists. They are intellectual purists because they insist on a set of features for their discipline, philosophy, which any material or practice purporting to merit being so-called must pass muster. These features include the following: individual, adversarial, textual, dialogical, argumentative, and so on. They therefore wish to eliminate all what they call pseudo-philosophies from their discipline. While they do not deny that there is an African philosophy, they do not share the enthusiasm of ethnophilosophers, especially, that such an 'African philosophy' existed before the second half of the last century. If African philosophy exists at all, critical theorists argue, it is bound up with the writings and works of their selves (Bodunrin, 1984:1-2).

To Peter Bodunrin, the type of philosophy being expounded by African philosophers in the African universities, which is characterized by rigour in analysis and criticism of African cultural beliefs and those issues that affect the African society, is what could be said to be African philosophy. Anthony Appiah, Paulin Hountodji, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, among others, are some of the notable exponents of this position. To them, the task of the African philosopher ought to go beyond the mere description of how Africans think to evaluating the plausibility of African cultural beliefs and practices. Critical theorists avow that "African philosophy must be critical, conceptual and reconstructive" (Oladipo, 2009, p. 69).

African philosophy must be critical, according to critical theorists, in the sense that every idea must be scrutinized and tested for logical coherence. It must be conceptual because with the aid of proper analysis of terms and theories, many problems will be resolved as clarity is achieved thereby. Lastly, critical theorists maintain that African philosophy must be reconstructive because no idea is perfect or entirely bad; following from proper conceptual analysis and critical reflection, ideas get improved upon – that is, are reconstructed (pp. 69 - 70).

On the positive side, the critical theorists should be applauded for desiring to introduce criticisms and rigour into African philosophy. But their position on how African philosophy should be done suffers from a number of shortcomings. First, they wrongly think there is *a* definition of philosophy. You also know by now that one of the first things you knew as a new student of philosophy is that there is *no* univocal definition of the discipline. Second, there insistence that philosophy is only doable if and only if there are written texts ignores the fact a substantial portion of the 'model' history of Western philosophy is based on oral tradition. If this significant part of Western philosophy is not discounted as philosophical, on pain of consistency, critical theorists cannot insist that what they derogatorily call 'folk philosophy' or 'ethnophilosophy' is not philosophy because it is overwhelmingly oral, not textual.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have learnt of another important current in African philosophy. You learnt, albeit summarily, the position of critical theorists on the tasks of African philosophy. You also learnt of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the critical theorists' position.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- the critical current in African philosophy corresponds with the universalist orientation in African philosophy
- Bodunrin, Appiah, Wiredu and Hountondji are notable exponents of this current
- critical theorists have a running 'beef' with ethnophilosophers. They wish to rid philosophy of pretenders
- they have a global conception of philosophy and, on their conception, the brand of African philosophy being done by non-members of their current is not philosophical

- some important weaknesses assail this current. It also has some strengths.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

Attempt an outline of the critical current of doing African philosophy. Do not forget to evaluate your essay.

7.0   References/Further Readings

Bodunrin, P.O. (1984), "The Question of African Philosophy" in Richard A. Wright (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction,* 3rd ed. New York: University Press of America.

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Oladipo, Olusegun. (1992). *The idea of African Philosophy: A Critical Study of the Major Orientation in Contemporary African Philosophy.* Ibadan: Molecular. Publishers.

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UNIT 5: RELEVANCE SCHOOL

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this unit of this module, you will learn of the relevance school's position on the task of African philosophy. As you will soon find out, the members of the relevance school honestly think the other currents in African philosophy miss their marks. They miss their marks, members of the relevance school contend, because they were remotely, if at all ever, concerned with ensuring that the products of their intellectual endeavours had bearing in transforming the existential experiences of their compatriots.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- explain the position of the members of the relevance school on African philosophy
- understand the motivation behind the relevance school's position on African philosophy

3.0   Main Content

To understand the position of the relevance school theorists, you need to bear the following passage in mind very well:

> *"The problem surrounding the idea of African philosophy is not that of fashioning an authentic philosophy which will be true to African cultures and traditions. Nor is it the problem of a division between those who advocate a strong Western orientation in African philosophy and those who take a deviant route. It is not even simply a conceptual problem, having much to do with the meaning of cross-cultural concepts. Rather, the problem is that of the extent to which African philosophers have been able to put their intellect in the service of the aspirations and struggles of African peoples"* (Oladipo, 1992, p. 7).

From this broad passage you should be able to distil the main arguments and claims of the relevance school.

The relevance school was founded and championed by Olusegun 'Teju Oladipo (1957 - 2009). Oladipo was a professor in the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. The main portion of the position of the relevance school on African philosophy can be gleaned from Oladipo's slim but hugely influential work, *The Idea of African Philosophy* (1992). In that book, Oladipo rejects, through arguments, the position of all the previous currents on African philosophy. Oladipo, in his earlier referenced work, argues that as a consequence of the jejune controversy over the nature and task of African philosophy by members of all previous currents and orientations in African philosophy a 'crisis of relevance' has since brewed in the discipline. In letting this crisis of relevance fester and un-tended to, Oladipo reasons, African philosophy and its practitioners have become 'fiddling Neros' while Africans 'burn' or remain in the throes of underdevelopment; an aberrant situation that African philosophers can, and ought to, overthrow.

From the standpoint of the members of the relevance school, therefore, Africans philosophers need not waste intellectual energy and capital on irresolvable polemics which had little or no bearing whatsoever in transforming the lives of their compatriots.

The task of African philosophers, according to members of the relevance school, is to be responsive to the several existential crises that threaten to prevent African people from leading the 'good life.' The foregoing is why Oladipo goes on to add that "the primary task of African philosophers should be to begin to create a tradition of thinking and discourse whose main focus

would be on issues affecting the interests and aspirations of their peoples" (p. 31). The contents of such a 'relevant' programme of African philosophy include the "analysis, critique and reconstruction of traditional conceptual schemes, the examination of the ideological foundation of the African predicament, and the consideration of issues… in other disciplines" (p. 113).

As you are likely to agree, the position of the relevance school sounds agreeable enough. For what is the use of expending tax-payers monies on a useless venture? But it is precisely this concern for relevance that critics worry over the relevance school's project. Kolawole Owolabi, for example, worries about the overt concern for relevance of knowledge (Owolabi, 1993, pp. 125-6). Owolabi is of the view that "the rigour of theoretical analysis cannot be sustained if we are too committed to the issue of practical relevance" (p. 126).

4.0   Conclusion

The unit has treated another of the five currents of African philosophy. This unit has successfully shown the main points of the school – its criticisms of pre-existing currents, its own program for African philosophy alongside its main strengths and weaknesses.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- the relevance current rejects the positions of previous currents of African philosophy on the tasks of African philosophy
- the relevance school is a 'neo-Marxist' school in the sense that it gauges the worth of any idea on the premise of its practical or utilitarian values
- Olusegun Oladipo is the relevance school's chief proponent
- critics of the position worry over the relevance school's somewhat overt attention on relevance of knowledge to the apparent detriment of its intrinsic values.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

On what basis did the relevance school members reject the approaches of traditionalists and modernists in African philosophy?

7.0 References/Further Readings

Bodunrin, P.O. (1984), "The Question of African Philosophy" in Richard A. Wright (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction,* 3rd ed. New York: University Press of America.

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UNIT 6:   THE CONVERSATIONAL SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will be introduced to one final current in African philosophy. This current, the conversational school of philosophy, is a very recent one. Although its general tenor, unlike the five previous ones, is still being set, you are being introduced to it anyways. This is with the mind set that you will be up to date with issues and problems in African philosophy. Indeed, it is expected that as a result of your study of this unit, you will be well primed for other courses on African philosophy which you will pass through as part of your B.A programme in philosophy.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- conceptualise conversation
- explain the origins and scope of the conversational school of philosophy
- critique or evaluate the conversational school of philosophy.

3.0 Main Content

The conversational school or current in African philosophy is perhaps the latest in the many currents of the discipline. Based in the University of Calabar's School of Philosophy, the protagonists of this current, led by Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam, wish to give African philosophy a reputable footing in human intellectual circles. For Chimakonam (2015a), "to converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information" (p. 19). As a method of doing (African) philosophy, however, to converse means to have an exchange with a fellow intellectual with the intent to scrutinising each other's positions on a mutually agreed knotty issue; and ultimately at arriving at a better one. Chimakonam writes further on this:

> *"By conversational philosophy we mean that type of philosophical engagement between individual thinkers with one another, on phenomenological issues of concern, or one another's thoughts where thoughts are unfolded from concepts or from concepts of concepts" (pp. 19-20).*

At this point, you should be curious enough to wish to find out how the conversational school, with their professed method of rigorous argumentations, differ from an earlier current you had learnt of, that is, the critical current. Chimakonam apparently responds to this charge when he clarifies that, unlike the critical current, adherents of the conversational current do not accept the "Western mode of thought" as default model for analysing African issues. Eclectism, albeit rigorous one, in other words, is at the core of this school's programme for African philosophy. on this note, the conversational school becomes, for its exponents (like Pantaleon Iroegbu, Innocent Asouzu, Bruce Janz, Chimakonam already named, and so on), a universalist current.

But it is important for you to note that the conversational current is still gradually taking shape. Although it tries to overcome the challenges of the universalist and particularist schools, it nevertheless cannot strictly be separated from the basic presuppositions of both schools. Perhaps with more rigorous work by advocates of this school, the conversational school will begin to have its own distinct shape and contributions to the development of African philosophy.

4.0 Conclusion

This unit has examined the contents of the conversational school's programme for doing African philosophy. The school's programme, though still metamorphosing, is that African philosophy

can and should be done in their suggested conversational method. It is hoped that you have grasped all of the points treated therein.

5.0 Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- to converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information.
- conversationalism is a method of doing African philosophy which involves an intellectual sparring, by philosophers, on a mutually agreed knotty issue. The pre-conceived goal here being to arriving at a better position on theoretical matters of practical relevance.
- conversational school was inaugurated by scholars from the University of Calabar's School of philosophy.
- the conversational school, because of its recent status, is still taking shape.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

i. How would you define conversation?

ii. Sketch out an outline of conversationalism as a method of doing African philosophy.

7.0 References/Further Readings

Chimakonam, J. O. 2017. "Conversationalism as an Emerging Method of Thinking in and Beyond African Philosophy. *Acta Academia.* 49:2, 11-33.

Chimakonam, J. O. 2015a. "Conversational Philosophy as a New School of Thought in African Philosophy: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of 'Philosophical Space.'" *Confluence: Journal of World Philosophies*. 3, 9-40.

Chimakonam, J. O. 2015b "Transforming the African Philosophical Place through Conversations: An Inquiry into the Global Expansion of Thought (GET)." In *South African Journal of Philosophy,* 34:4, 462-479.

Module 4

UNIT 1:   THE NATURE OF AFRICAN HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

        3.1.   What is (African) History?

        3.2.   Historiography

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will be learning of another important area of this course: the issues surrounding the history, if any, of the discipline of African philosophy. As a foregrounding of the discussions to follow here and after, you need to first know what history means. Secondly, you need to be

aware of the methodology for studying history. With such background, you will be able to have a handle on the discussion in latter study units of the present module

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- explain the meaning of history and historiography
- determine if Africans have a history or not.

3.0 Main Content

3.1. What is (African) History?

The word, 'history,' came from the Greek word, *historia. Historia,* in Greek, means inquiry; or, put differently, knowledge acquired after diligent investigation or searching. This etymological analysis of the concept of history readily reveals at least two things about it: its goal (knowledge) and its means (investigation). And according to Aristotle (2015), a famous Greek philosopher, it is in the nature of every human being to want to have knowledge (p. 31). In other words, and for Aristotle, every activity of humans is geared towards one goal – knowledge. Aside the fact that humans satiate their 'natural' curiosities by knowing about any state of affairs that interests them, knowledge also has utilitarian ends; it can be used to achieve other goals. This is why you would probably have heard the quote, from Francis Bacon, another great philosopher, that knowledge is power.

Given the way humans have always coveted knowledge, one should naturally wonder how they attain this state (of knowledge). As earlier noted, humans know via investigation. That is to say, investigation of subsisting evidences – written, oral, etc. According to a popular definition of history, though, it is only from written testimonies about an even that knowledge that is objective and impersonal can be acquired. On this view of history, history boils down to a deliberative study of past events as gleaned from written documents.

A probably cheap way you can discard this argument is to press its proponents if their injunction emanated from some written records. More seriously, while written documents are good sources for drawing historical materials, they should not be the only means since a vast array of the events in people's past lives are unwritten. At any rate, writing is a relatively recent invention of human beings and more recently cultivated by yet many others (think Africa here). If you find

these statements agreeable, you should not be moved by the words of scholars like Hugh Trevor-Roper (Trevor-Roper, 1968) who infamously declares that:

> *"Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present, there is none; there is only history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness… and darkness is not a subject of history"* (p. 9).

Perhaps, a less controversial way you may put the definition of history is to define it as an academic discipline which aims to record past events for the use of contemporary and future generations.

3.2. Historiography

A crude way to put historiography is to say it is the history of history. That is to say, historiography is the study of how history, as a discipline, has been done across the ages and in different societies. The possible goal here being for comparative purposes. Historiography is a meta-theoretical venture; it inquires into the very reason why history should be done, anyways. Historiography may be called the philosophy of history. For example, historiographers or philosophers of history if you prefer ask questions like what should be the proper unit of studying the past (say, individuals? Groups? Civilizations? Nation-State?)? Is there, perhaps, an 'invisible hand' in the history of humans that bring about events? Or does history just happens? Is it the case that 'history repeats itself' – which invariably translates as saying that history has its own impersonal purpose?

4.0 Conclusion

This unit has discussed the meaning of history vis-à-vis Africa. You also got to find out the meaning of historiographer, its nature and how it differs from history.

5.0 Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- history is an academic discipline which aims to record past events for the use of contemporary and future generations
- historiography, on the other hand, is a discourse on about the discipline of history. It busies itself with fashioning it suitable models for making the study of the past (history) systematic, rewarding and exciting.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

How would you define history?

What is historiography?

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 2:   HISTORICAL PERIODISATION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

Having examined the meanings of history, historiography and African history in the previous unit, it is now time you localised that discussion. Here, you will narrow down your earlier general foray into the study of history to the particular standpoint of African philosophy. In other words, you will be learning of the history of African philosophy. As a window into this business, you will learn of the various 'periods' of the history of African philosophy. Simultaneously, you will have the opportunity to learn of the contents of each of these periods.

**2.0	Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)**

By the end of this unit you would be able to:

- Periodise the history of African philosophy
- Explain the various periods of the history of African philosophy

**3.0	Main Content**

**3.1.	Ancient Period (10,000 BC – 700 BC)**

The period was dominated by the black civilization of old Egypt in North Africa. Philosophy was conducted from diverse centres of learning in places like Hermopolis, Memphis, Heliopolis, Thebes and Alexandria. Mythology, mysticism and ancestral worship – in short, metaphysics – were the main pre-occupations of these philosophers. Much later, though, philosophers of a more logical, conceptual and empiricist cast of mind emerged on the scenes. Ultimately, the ancient period of the history of African philosophy witnessed at least five schools of thought: "Hermopolitan, Heliopolitan, Memphite, Thebean and Telel-Arnema thought systems" (p. 45). As you would also have noticed, these schools correspond, more or less, with the five centres of learning earlier listed. Initially, cosmological concerns dominated the thoughts of these philosophers, anthropological and scientific ones featured quite prominently too. Imhotep, Ptah-Hotep, Amenohotep and A'hmose were some of the popular philosophers of this period.

**3.2.	Greek Period (6 BC – Christ's Birth)**

As you will see from the brevity of this period, basically nothing significant, in a positive sense, happened here. It was a period of global power shift as political power moved from Egypt to Greece. With the conquest of Egypt by the Greeks came the pillaging of its intellectual and material wealth. What may now be seen as positive, with only the benefit of hindsight, is the unwitting transfer/storage of Egyptian philosophy materials/ideas in Greek libraries or 'original' Greek authors like Plato, Aristotle and other popular ones who merely, say Diop, Henry Olela and S. I. Udoidem, "plagiarized" the works of Egyptian philosophers. It would take centuries of revision to rectify this injustice.

3.3   Early Christian Period (1 AD – 269 AD)

This period was one that saw the synthesis of several cultures: Greek, Roman, Persian and Egyptian. Christianity, made popular by the hegemonic state of the period, Rome, shaped the philosophy of that era. Several schools and philosophers, like Cicero, Plutarch, Ammonus Sacca, Plotinus, St. Augustine, Hypatia (a female philosopher), etc, shaped the character of that period's philosophy.

3.4   Ethiopian Philosophy (300 AD – 1300 AD)

Christianity also played a great role in the development and character of the Ethiopic era of the history of African philosophy. Skandes, Mikael, Zara Yacob and Waldat Heywat, Hermes Trismengistus are some of the philosophers of this period. It was centred on ancient Ethiopian civilization of the 4th century AD to the 13th.

3.5   Islamic West African Period (7th Century AD – 13th Century AD)

Islam and Christianity, both Abrahamic faiths (alongside Judaism), are religious movements which developed outside Africa but had huge influence on the material and intellectual lives of Africans since the beginning of the birth of Jesus and Mohammed's flight to Medina, Saudi Arabia. In the period between 7th century to 13th century, Islam affected the character of African philosophy as well. The dominant states of that era, domiciled in West Africa, Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Bornu, doubled as centres for the flourishing of African philosophy in this period. By implication, the major philosophers in this period like Baba Ahmed of the University of

Timbuktu, Mali (one of the oldest universities in the world, founded by King Mansa Musa, famed as the richest man who ever lived), Ibn Khaldun, a philosopher of history and founding father of Sociology (pp. 54 - 55), etc., were also Islamic clerics.

3.6   Early African Contact with Europe Period (13ᵗʰ Century AD – 17ᵗʰ Century AD)

You are probably wondering about the seemingly 'awkward' way this title looks; more so since Europeans have always been in contact with Africans. Not quite so. What you need to note here is that we are referring to a different interaction of Africans and Europeans which had implications for the history of African philosophy. First, this period doubles as the renaissance/return to secular philosophy period of Western philosophy. Second, the period witnessed a change in tempo in Africans' interaction with Europe as the latter saw them as trade materials to be shipped, by coercion or persuasion to their American plantations. Due to the political and social turmoil that characterised this period, the philosophers of the period lived in exile, e.g. Zara Yacob, Walda Heywat and Anton Wilhelm Amo.

3.7   Western Colonial Period (18ᵗʰ Century AD – 19ᵗʰ Century AD)

This period not only formalised, in the discipline of philosophy, the previous period's intellectual tyranny of Africa, it also made major contributions to African philosophy. The Eurocentric and racist writings of major European philosophers of that era, like Kant and Hume, set the tone for the re-emergence of African philosophy. It also stimulated the interest of latter African philosophers to help correct many of the wrong assumptions about Africans having never contributed to the (global) history of ideas (philosophy).

3.8   Contemporary Period (20ᵗʰ Century till date)

Contemporary African philosophy can itself be trifurcated into stages: the first stage was dominated by Western ethnographers, anthropologists and sociologists whose view that Africans were 'primitive' implied that they never philosophised – at least in the Western sense of that word. The second stage comprises of philosophers who seek to correct the wrong impressions about Africans allegedly perpetuated by the Western academy. The last stage, according to Ogunmodede, corresponds with a move "towards an historico-cultural reconstructivism" (p. 62).

4.0   Conclusion

In sum, then, African philosophy, as you have seen, exists. It also predates Western philosopher and it can also be periodised, following Ogunmodede's approach, in a more exciting manner than the West's or the Chinese's, for that matter.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- African philosophy has a longer history than Western philosophy, contrary to many scholars' belief.
- Imhotep, not Thales, is the first known philosopher in the world
- African philosophy has moved through the ages and has been shaped by many internal and external events which necessitated the need to divide it into at least eight periods

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

Identify the eight periods of the history of African philosophy.

7.0   References/Further Readings

Makumba, P. M. (2007). *Introduction to African Philosophy.* Nairobi: Pauline Publications

Ogunmodede, F. I. (2004). "The Problem of History and Historiography in African Philosophy" In Francis Ogunmode (Ed.) *African Philosophy Down the Ages: 10,000 BC to the Present.*   Ibadan: Hope Publications.

UNIT 3:   KEY HISTORICAL FIGURES IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

      3.1.   Imhotep (d. 2800 BC)

      3.2.   Plotinus (203 – 269 AD)

      3.3   St. Augustine of Hippo (354 AD – 430 AD)

      3.4   Zara Yacob (1599 AD – 1692 AD)

      3.5   Anton Wilhelm Amo (1730 – 1756 AD)

      3.6   John Samuel Mbiti (b. 1931)

      3.7   Paulin J. Hountondji (b. 1942)

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

This unit discusses the philosophical ideas of a selected array of African philosophy. In this unit, you will see that Africa also had a number of great philosophers who have been under reported.

With what you will learn in this unit, such erroneous thinking, as the preceding one, will be dispelled.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Identify some key African philosophers
- Explain the specifics of the ideas of selected African philosophers

3.0   Main Content

3.1.   Imhotep (d. 2800 BC)

Imhotep is reputed, on some accounts, as the first known philosopher. He belongs to the ancient Egyptian period of African philosophy. Imhotep was a polymath as he was, besides being a notable philosopher, a poet, jurist, engineer, scribe, astrologer, physician, etc. As a philosopher, Imhotep holds that the universe did not emerge *ex nihilo* or 'out of nothing.' Rather, it originated from a primordial substance, *Nun*. Alongside the four basic elements: *Shu* (air), *Tefnut* (water), *Geb* (earth) and *Nun* (heaven), the universe, in Imhotep's view, is a balance of opposites.

3.2.   Plotinus (203 – 269 AD)

Plotinus is another key historical figure in African philosophy. Plotinus also holds a prominent place in the history of Western Philosophy. He is regularly regarded as a Neo-Platonist. This is because his ideas were influenced by Plato of Athens' and his Christian religion. According to Plotinus, the world originates from a primordial force he tags 'The One.' The One, for him, is pure act and reality.

3.3   St. Augustine of Hippo (354 AD – 430 AD)

Aurelius Augustine was born in the Roman province of Numidia, North Africa, to a non-Christian father and a Christian mother. He ultimately became a devout Christian himself after a

youthful life of philandering. Augustine moved over to Rome after his Christian conversion. There, he got acquainted with the philosophy of Plato. Like Plotinus, Augustine was also a Neo-Platonist. This is well-shown with his doctrine of twin cities: city of God and city of man. This theory bears a close affinity with Plato's theory about the world of forms/ideas and appearances.

3.4   Zara Yacob (1599 AD – 1692 AD)

Zara Yacob was a 17th century Ethiopian philosopher. He lived between 1599 and 1692 AD. He spent much of his life in exile, though. But it was in this situation of exile that Yacob developed and wrote his philosophical treatises which bears striking similarity with the rationalism of French philosopher, Rene Descartes, his contemporary. Yacob's philosophy was also a synthesis of faith and reason; although he thinks that reason should lead faith, he believes that rationalism of Yacob dominated his entire philosophical system.

3.5   Anton Wilhelm Amo (1730 – 1756 AD)

In Maurice Makumba's words, "Amo is the first African philosopher to study and teach in European universities" (p. 91). Amo was originally born in Ghana but moved over to Europe at a very young age where he studied philosophy at the universities of Halle, Wittenberg and Jena. According to Makumba, Amo wrote a book titled *Inaugural Dissertation on the Rights of Moors (Africans) in Europe* where he sought to combat the menace of the trans-atlantic slave trade of Africans to Europe and America.

3.6   John Samuel Mbiti (b. 1931)

J. S. Mbiti is a Kenyan philosopher and theologian. He is a towering figure in contemporary African philosophy. He is often associated with that current in African philosophy which you learned in the third module of this study material, that is, ethnophilosophy. Although an ordained priest in the Anglican Church, Mbiti's seminal work, *African Religions and Philosophy*, published in 1969, saw him challenge pre-existing assumptions of some Christian writers on African traditional religions. Mbiti's overall attempt, in his writings, is to show that African traditional religious beliefs were not entirely antagonistic to Christianity. He urges students of African philosophy to first engage in field trips to native communities in order to be able to get

first-hand information on African cultural practices and ideas and thenceforth glean their philosophical imports.

3.7 Paulin J. Hountondji (b. 1942)

P. J. Hountondji is a Beninese philosopher who is a professor of philosophy at the National University of Benin, Cotonou, Benin Republic. He studied in France where he got his PhD in 1970. As you will see, Hountondji's philosophy was shaped by the European tradition. With such background, you will probably now understand why he has a running feud with those he describes as 'ethnophilosophers' masquerading as 'real' philosophers. Hountondji is an intellectual purist; for he holds that the discipline of philosophy has a unique and universal methodology, definition and character. As he argues in his celebrated work, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Hountondji opines that African philosophy is just in the making.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit, you learnt of a select catalogue of African philosophers – seven in all. You need to bear in mind that there are scores more neither mentioned nor discussed here. Brevity of space, no less than the sheer impossibility of such a venture, would not allow us to study all these African philosophers. The few you learned of, of course, were selected across the different time zones of the history of African philosophy. You did this with particular reference to the highlights of the philosophical careers of these great thinkers.

5.0 Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:
- There are so many philosophers in African philosophy
- The history of African philosophy, properly written of, should commence from Egypt, not from the last century's 'inauguration' by Fr. Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy.*
- Imhotep is the first philosopher in Africa, nay the world.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Who are some of the key figures in African philosophy?

7.0 References/Further Readings

Makumba, P. M. (2007). *Introduction to African Philosophy.* Nairobi: Pauline Publications

Ogunmodede, F. I. (2004). "The Problem of History and Historiography in African Philosophy"
        In Francis Ogunmode (Ed.) *African Philosophy Down the Ages: 10,000 BC to the Present.*   Ibadan: Hope Publications.

UNIT 4:   SOME CONTROVERSIES ON PERIODISATION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this final unit of module 4, you will be introduced to some methodological controversies in periodising the history of African philosophy. You will recall, in unit 2, that in selecting Ogunmodede's eight-fold model of periodising the history of African philosophy, you were told of other historians of Africa philosophy's attempt to advance alternative categorisation. At any rate, and as you noticed from that unit's discussion, no reason was offered for adopting Ogunmodede's model in favour of others'. You will now revisit this controversy again with a view to studying it more closely. The purpose, as usual, is both cognitive and mediative.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Understand that controversies exist in attempts at periodising African philosophy

- Mediate in this periodising controversy with a view to a possible resolution of same.

3.0   Main Content

You will recall, from unit 2, that Fr. Ogunmodede and many other revisionist historians have argued, quite forcefully, that the history of philosophy, in general, begun in Africa. According to Ogunmodede (2004), Imhotep of Egypt, who died around 2,800 BC, and not Thales of Miletus, who was not even born until over 2,000 years after the former's death, was the first known philosopher in history (p. 41). In his view, African philosophers need to attune themselves with these 'alternative facts' which have a more superior cognitive value than those perpetuated by the Eurocentric academy. On Ogunmodede's view, therefore, the history of African philosophy must commence with a survey of ancient Egyptian philosophy. In periodising such a history of African philosophy whose genesis is in Egypt, Ogunmodede again takes the radical step of adopting an eight-fold classification, thus: Ancient Period, Greek Period, Early Christian Period, Ethiopian Philosophy, Islamic West African Period, Early African Contact with Europe Period, Western Colonial Period and Contemporary Period.

Before Ogunmodede, though, several other historians of African philosophy had differing views on how to periodise this history of African philosophy. This is even without prejudice to the more fundamental controversy bordering on the existence and nature of African philosophy. You will, of course, not be bored with a repeated treatment of the latter controversy as this had been done before now. What you need to know, now, is that there are several other views, apart from Ogunmodede's, on this periodization matter. For convenience, we can bifurcate these scholars based on when they think African philosophy started. The first are those who say African philosophy's inauguration coincided with the 1945 publication of Fr. Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* while some others insist on a longer date; as far as 2,800 BC.

Pantaleon Iroegbu and Lancinay Keita, who both adopted a three-fold classification (ancient, medieval and contemporary/modern), as well as Fr. Francis Ogunmodede, who employs an eight-fold model, are in this camp. In brief, what Ogunmodede, who is chosen here as the chief spokesperson of this camp, says is, and as earlier noted, that a broader model of periodising

African philosophy ought to adopted by all. On the other hand are those who prefer a narrower model – coinciding with the publication date of Tempels' earlier reference work.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you focused on the controversy on periodising African philosophy. This was done with a view to assisting you in making informed decision on where you will pitch your ideological tent in this polemic.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- Imhotep is an ancient Egyptian/Black philosopher
- Some historians of African philosophy think the discipline begun two millennia before the birth of Christ, others say it is more recent
- This differing view on the genesis of African philosophy is what is responsible for the sharp differences in the periods, and contents thereof, of the history of African philosophy

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

Attempt an exposition of the controversy on periodising the history of African philosophy.

7.0   References/Further Readings

Makumba, P. M. (2007). *Introduction to African Philosophy.* Nairobi: Pauline Publications

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Module 5

Unit 1: Personhood
Unit 2: Cultural Identity
Unit 3: Freewill and Pre-Destination
Unit 4: Language Question in African Philosophy
Unit 5: Individual-Community Relationship in African Philosophy
Unit 6: Morality and Moral Values in African Philosophy

UNIT 1:   PERSONHOOD

Contents

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
3.0   Main Content
       3.1.   Analysis and Comparisons of the Yoruba, Akan and Igbo Concepts of Person
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

Contents

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will learn how to analyze the concept of a person from both the physical and non-physical (metaphysical) perspectives, drawing out their moral and social implications. Furthermore, the analysis of the concept of a person, that you will be understudying in this unit, will be done from a comparative perspective bringing into proper perspective the analysis of a person in Yoruba, Igbo and Akan cultures of West Africa.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- know the two major components of a person
- know the centrality of the concept of a person in any human activity, be it moral, social, religious and economic.
- know the differences and similarities in the concept of a person among the Yoruba, Akan and Igbo people.
- know that both the physical and non-physical aspect of a person have influence on each other.

3.0   Main Content

According to Awolalu and Dopamu, a person is related to God in three important ways. First, through the creation of man, which according to oral tradition is the work of God through his agents. Secondly, man is also related to God in consequence of the essence of his being which can only be put in man by the Supreme Being. Thirdly, man is related to God through his destiny. This is because it is the Supreme Being that seals man's destiny (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979:156). The above presuppositions therefore force some scholars to assert of the West

African people, in particular, that, among other things, man possesses a kind of transcendental self, which though invisible, is real (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979:156).

In the African conception of man, the belief in the reality of spirit has helped to overcome the problem regarding the relationship between the body and the mind. D. E. Idoniboye asserts that Descartes' position that the soul is immaterial and immortal implies that it survives the body, but Descartes does not say what happens to the soul when it abdicates its liaison with the body (Idoniboye, 1973:85). The following questions necessarily arise: Does it (soul) or could it simply float or wander about in space?, Or does it return to its creator? According to Idoniboye, the above are all unanswered questions to which African metaphysics can readily provide answers. To him therefore,

> "the symbiotic explanation of the body-mind relationship... is more plausible than other explanations in the dualistic idiom because it stems from a simple theory of mind which also accommodates other traditional African beliefs like witchcraft, leopard and other animal cults" (Idoniboye, 1973:87).

Having said so much on the general African belief, let us now shift our attention to specific cultures in order to underscore the issues we have been grappling with.

3.1. Analysis and Comparisons of the Yoruba, Akan and Igbo Concepts of Person

The Yoruba, Akan and Igbo believe in the inner head or personality soul which derives from God or Supreme Being. This inner head is largely responsible for human destiny. The Yoruba call it *Ori,* the Akans call it *okra/okara,* while the Igbos call it *Chi* or *Uwa.* Apart from this they also believe in some animating spirit, *emi* (Yoruba), *sunsum* and *Honhom* (Akan) and *ndu* (Igbo). Furthermore, in talking about the variation, the degree of rigidity in predestination and destiny varies. For instance the Yoruba and Igbo have a flexible notion of predestination, while the Akan have a very rigid notion. At the physical level, there is hardly any variation among the Yoruba, Akan and Igbo people as they all believe that a person is made up of the physical body with all the biological organs playing certain interconnected roles to ensure the survival of the human being. The physical person is called *eniyan* - among the Yoruba, *Onipa* among the Akans and *Madu* among the Igbos. Just like the Yoruba conception, the Akan and the Igbo also believe that

the physical and non-physical elements are related and both have implications for the moral and social status of a person.

We start by looking at the personality soul, the spirit and the animating spirit. Looking at the Akan and Igbo cultures, there are three interrelated elements that play these roles. Among the Akan, the personality soul is the *Okra,* the *sunsum* is both the spirit responsible for one's personality and there is *honhom* which is the breath. Among the Igbo, there is the *Mmuo,* the spirit of a person that is capable of reincarnation, the *Nkpru Obi* is the personality soul, it is said to be material and perishes with the body at the death. The *Ndu* is the animating entity that gives life. It is just like the *honhom* of the Akan and the *emi* of the Yoruba.

One question you are probably wresting with, in light of the foregoing, is whether the Igbo and Yoruba conceptions are dualistic or tripartite. It seems that we shall only be led into conceptual muddle if we try to determine that. The Igbo conception in which we have the *mmuo* (spirit) *Nkpruobi* (soul) *Ndu* (life activating principle) and body *(Ahu)* also shows some overlap. The same for the Yoruba ontology in which we have *ori* (personality soul), *emi* (Activating life principle) and *Ara* (body). It is better to say that the Akans, Yoruba and Igbo have a holistic conception of a person rather than imposing European categories on them. Another comparison worth noting is that in both Akan and Igbo belief systems, the *Okra* and *Nkpruobi* are given quasi-material and material status respectively.

At the physical realm, the Akan, Yoruba, and Igbo believe that a person is made of body. *Hahnium* in Akan, *ahu* in Igbo and *ara* in Yoruba. They believe that the body is so important that it must be protected against all injuries. They also believe that within the world the body is the abode of the spiritual and non-physical elements such as *emi, sunsum, okra, nkpuruobi* and *Ndu.* Apart from these, the body also houses some vital physical organs of the body such as the heart - *okan, Nkpuruobi,* the brain - *opolo* (Yoruba) and the blood (*eje* in Yoruba, *Mogya* in Akan, and *Obara* in Igbo). According to Wiredu (Wiredu, 1983:119) the Mogya is supposed to derive from the mother and it is taken as the basis of his clan identity. The Igbo believe that *Obara* (blood) is central to the idea of a man's personality as well as to the personality of a family or community (Nwala, 1985:45). Because of its importance, it is not to be spilled unnecessarily because it can cause the dislocution of the flesh and deprive it of its *ancestral life line*. Apart from this, its spilling is also seen as the defilement of the land and the earth goddess *Ala* (Nwala, 1985:45).

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We can say the following of the Akan, Yoruba and Igbo about blood. First, it is a means of physical survival hence its constant preservation. Secondly, it is a means of ancestral or kinship link. Thirdly, it is also used in making vows among people to forestall betrayal.

4.0   Conclusion

In this lecture unit, you have examined the importance of the concept of a person in human culture. You also engaged in a comparative analysis of the concept of a person among the Yoruba, Akan and Igbo cultures noting that in all these cultures the physical and non-physical aspect of a person have far-reaching implication for moral and social life.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- the Yoruba, Akan and Igbo concepts of a person are quite similar; but there are important differences, too
- ontological holism, not monism, dualism or anything else, better describes the Yoruba, Akan and Igbo concepts of person

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

i.   What are some of the attributes common to the concept of a person in Akan, Yoruba and Igbo cultures?

ii. Describe the attitude towards destiny and predestination in Igbo, Yoruba and Akan cultures.

iii. What is the link between the physical and non-physical aspects of a person with regards to the moral and social status especially in Igbo and Yoruba cultures?

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 2:   CULTURAL IDENTITY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

The focus of this unit is on the debate on cultural identity. It is asked: given the contending facts of change and the urge to preserve a people's national memory, how can a balance be struck? Is it even possible, and desirable, to strike such balances? Yes or no, why and how should this be

done? In the brief discourse, you will go over this terrain with a view to keeping tabs on the sticking points of the debate's protagonists.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Define culture and identity
- Explain the controversy between traditionalists and modernists on the issue of cultural identity vis-à-vis African philosophy

3.0   Main Content

Culture has been defined as a way of life of a group of people. The understanding here is predicated on the fact that owing to the social nature of man, certain 'unifying' or common strains of behavior often crop up in their continued relationship with one another. These common strains/patterns of behavior—though abstract phenomena in themselves—are overtly manifested in the behaviors/attitudes and dispositions of such people.

Oladipo states that there two views on cultural identity in African philosophy. On the one hand are the 'Traditionalists', while on the other hand are the 'Modernists'. The traditionalists maintain that African cultural artefacts and thought-systems ought to be protected, defended and unchanged. Traditionalists posit that there *is* an authentic African cultural identity which stands in contrast to the prevailing identities that were apparently foisted on Africans (home and in the diaspora) by the West. It goes without saying that modernists have a differing, virtually opposite, position to the traditionalists.

Now, the issue of identity and self-definition has to do with the failure recorded by Africa, especially after independence, in the area of development. The question is asked whether we can retain our cultural peculiarities (Oladipo, 1995) which, in their confrontation with the Western culture, seem to have failed us. This is related to the question of how we, as Africans, can retain what is good in our culture and borrow from other cultures without necessarily losing our roots. This questions is important because a certain nationalistic zeal concerning our identity has made us to make a fetish of our beliefs such that we now pretend that values in other cultures do not really matter.

The issue of self-definition and identity is also related to the idea of conceptual decolonization. Conceptual decolonisation (Wiredu, 1995) derives from the call that we should rid ourselves of alien mentality derived from the use of foreign language in conceptualizing intellectual problems in Africa. It is believed that we do not have a proper grasp of our problems because we have an European mind-set as a result of the colonial encounter. Decolonizing our mind will involve having an African linguistic framework that can be used in addressing African problems. The above points to the need to fashion an indigenous language (Afolayan, 2006) of discourse for intellectual production in Africa.

4.0   Conclusion

What you have done in this unit is an examination of the debate on the necessity, or not, of cultural identity especially as it affects African philosophy. From this examination, you should be able to mediate in the debate.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- The debate on cultural identity dwells on the anxiety on change and permanence.
- Traditionalism and modernism are the two opposing camps in this debate with the latter maintaining that change is inevitable while the former, more conservative camp, insisting on the need to maintain permanence.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

 i.   What is cultural identity?
 ii. Explain the position of traditionalists and modernists on the issue of cultural identity.

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 3:   FREEWILL AND PRE-DESTINATION

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will be learning of one of the major issues in African metaphysics, namely freewill and predestination in Yoruba culture with a view to exposing the various dimensions of this problem and the arguments for and against both freewill and predestitiation. It is believed that by knowing the various dimension of this problem in Yoruba culture, you can also appreciate the various dimensions of this problem in other African cultures.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Define freewill and predestination'
- Show the relationship and contrasts between freewill and predestination

3.0   Main Content

The notion of freewill involves the belief that a person determines his actions without any external constraints. In other words, a person is said to have freewill, if he exercises his freedom from what may be referred to as inner will without the influence of other people or a god. Predestation or destiny involves the belief that man has just come into the world to fulfill that which he has been destined to carry out, especially by some powerful supernatural forces, at the peak of which is God.

Let us quickly not here that while predestation is synonymous with destiny or fatalism, it is not the same s determinism. Determinism is simply a philosophical or scientific thesis that postulates universal causality. By this it is meant that for every event that occurs, there are antecedent events, known or unknown that are responsible for that event. The philosophical debate between advocates of freewill and determinism has to do with whether man can take decision or execute decisions without antecedent causes. However, in this lecture we are concerned just with the debate between the advocates of freewill and that of predestation. In other words, we want to consider whether man can be said to be free without the influence of other forces, especially supernatural forces.

The Yoruba believe that a person has had his biography or life history written before he comes into the world (through birth). It is this biography that the person comes to the world to fulfil as can be seen in the notion of *ori* (inner head/destiny), which is described variously as *ayanmo* (destiny that is affixed on a person), *akunleyan* (destiny which is chosen while kneeling) and *akunlegba* (destiny which is received while kneeling). The questions that arise from our conception of destiny are: where is the place of human freedom vis-à-vis the metaphysical forces? Is the individual's life fated or predetermined? What attitude does the individual adopt in the face of some of the conflicting values. For instance, does he just resign himself to fate and take it that "what will be will be" or does he struggle to fashion a meaning out of existence?

The opinions of Yoruba scholars vary on the issue of predestination and human freedom. Some scholars, for example, Wande Abimbola (Abimbola, 1975), hold to a rigidly fatalistic interpretation, thereby suggesting that human freedom is illusory, because not even the gods can change *ori*. What is the reason for the denial of human freedom? The *ori* is said to be the essence of luck and the most important force responsible for human success or failure (Abimbola, 1975: 390). The *Ori* governs the individual's life and communicates with other major divinities on his behalf. Furthermore, whatever has not been approved by one's *ori* cannot be approved by the divinities (Ibid, 390). This reinforces the belief in predestination because the contents of an individual's life depend on the choice of *ori*. In terms of contents of the *ori,* it could range from fruitful and successful life, short life, wealthy life, problematic life and even and unsuccessful life.

In spite of the claim to the effect that *ori* is unalterable and making human freedom an illusion, many scholars have attempted to strike a balance between predestination and human freedom. Idowu (1962), Makinde (1984) Gbadegesin (1998), Ogungbemi (1992) and Owomoyela (1981) have shown that we can easily accommodate human freedom within the explanatory model of predestination. They anchor their arguments mainly on the following grounds:

  (i)   Predestination is a sort of covenant between two parties and, if this is so, the two parties can always review their covenant,

  (ii)   The use of sacrifice through Orunmila, an arch divinity, can also help to amend a bad destiny,

  (iii) *Iwa* (character) plays a vital role also in ameliorating or changing a person's destiny. There are myths which suggest that Olodumare (God) can have sympathy on persons who are well- behaved,

  (iv)   That freewill of human beings is depicted in their practical day to day existence in which industry, character-formation, moral responsibility and expediency play vital roles and

  (v)   It is even suggested that since each person kneels down as an individual to choose his *ori,* his freedom has been entrenched from that period onward. (Oyeshile, 2003:102-103).

Many scholars seem to agree that predestination is an explanatory model that is appealed to when natural explanations for certain occurrences are lacking. The Yoruba cosmology, Ogungbemi argues, presents the picture of man as a solitary individual who is left to pick his

way through a variety of forces, some benign, some hostile, many ambivalent, seeking to placate them. In all his travails, man is only aided by *ori*, destiny, chosen by himself before coming to earth (Ogungbemi, 1992: 105).

The position above is also supported by Idowu's account in which it is the *ori* that kneels before Olodumare to choose or receive or have the destiny affixed to it. The picture, therefore, is of a complete person kneeling before Olodumare to choose or receive (Idowu cited in Ogungbemi, 1992:105). Hence, we are being made to accept that the above presupposes freedom of choice and action, and moral responsibility (Ogungbemi, 1992:105).

Although it may seem that the Yoruba belief in predestination and the exercise of freedom, as seen in practical life, is contradictory, paradoxical, and inconsistent, our analysis so far suggests that it is not. The belief is rather an all-encompassing one in the sense that it cuts across the physical and non-physical aspects of man. In other words, it is *this-wordly* and *other-wordly*. And this is where the pragmatism of this view lies. The individual wants an explanation for everything that occurs in life to him and to others. And whether the belief in metaphysical agents produces positive or negative results, it helps him nevertheless to consolidate his belief as a being in a mysterious world, where solutions cannot readily be provided to all problems through human effort.

Having said all this, let us quickly note that with the advancements recorded in science and technology- especially through neuro-science, biotechnology and many other psychological based researches–much is now understood about human behavior and humanity's place in the world. This may seem to render invalid and vacuous those fatalistic interpretations of human destiny by scholars of traditional belief systems. However, we should also note that in spite of this scientific insight into human behavior, it cannot be denied that there are certain fundamental questions about man which are not amenable to scientific explanation. For instance, such questions as: What is the essence, purpose or goal of life? Why am I in the world? What happens to *emi* (the vital principle of life) when man dies? And how do we achieve happiness? These questions, while making other sources of probing into human life (such as the metaphysical and religious ones) attractive and relevant, also make the construal of science as the definite solution to human predicament problematic.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have examined the metaphysical issue of freewill and predestination. What emerged from the foregoing is that science, though, can question such belief in predestination, yet science is just an answer as it cannot provide solution to every question that bother the human mind.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- an adherence to predestination will result in the denial of human freedom.

- supporters of predestination believe that destiny is inalterable and that man only comes into the world to fulfil his destiny while opponents assert that freewill and predestination are compatible and that the practical life of the Yoruba suggests that they are pragmatic people who exercise considerable freedom in their action in life.

- predestination is an explanatory construct that is appealed to when natural explanations fail, we also examined the belief in predestination given our contemporary scientific framework.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

Explain the concepts of freewill, determinism and pre-destination taking time to show their differences and similarities, if any.

7.0   References/Further Readings

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UNIT 4:   LANGUAGE QUESTION IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

4.0   Conclusion

5.0   Summary

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   Introduction

In this unit your concern will be on the Language question in African philosophy. This central question can be put into different forms such as: the role of language in the interpretation of belief systems, the problem of practicing philosophy in alien language, the role of language in African's conception of reality and the problem of translation of language from one culture to the

other. For instance, Afolayan (2006) examines the relevance of the language question for the post-colonial African culture, especially taking into cognizance the burden of African development in contemporary world. Although you will not be able to learn every aspect of this problem in this unit, you shall, at the very minimum have a holistic view of the importance of language in African conception of reality.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- trace the origin of the language question in African philosophy
- identify the questions that surround the issue of doing African philosophy in a foreign tongue especially bearing in mind the fact that language and thinking/philosophising share an inextricable affinity.

3.0   Main Content

The language problem in African philosophy has its genesis in the conception of philosophy as a Western enterprise. A lot of debates had been engaged in as to whether Africans had a philosophy before their contact with the whites. Many of the arguments concerning this have been stated in earlier lectures. However, it must be noted that early African Professional Philosophers from different African countries were trained in Western Philosophy using European language such as English and French.

It became a *fait accompli* that early African philosophers were doing African philosophy in alien language. The questions that arise from doing African philosophy in alien languages are many. First, can it be said that the philosophers were really doing African philosophy with foreign or alien language given the peculiarities of each culture concerning nuances, idioms, proverbs and wise sayings in African cultures. Second, is it not the case that African philosophers were looking for linguistic equivalents of western philosophical concepts in their own cultures?

Thirdly, another problem has to do with the accurate translation of certain concepts from indigenous African cultures to alien languages. One may ask whether it is possible to translate indigenous concepts, especially those concepts that deal with theoretical statements to alien language such as English and French and vice versa? There is also the problem of the interrelation of language of discourse of reality and African development.

Having stated some of these problems let us briefly examine some philosophical positions concerning some of them. In translating one language to another within different cultures, it is believed that a set of translation manual that contains the exact meanings of words and concepts in different culture will help out. However, according to W.V.O Quine, this is not possible. Quine describes this through what he calls the "principle of indetermnancy of translation" (Quine, 1960). According to Sogolo, (1993: 27) Quine admits that it is possible setting up such translation manual but this cannot be applied to certain areas of discourse in which it is impossible for such a translation manual to convey the exact meaning of an original assertion into a translated one.

Quine's position is hinged on the fact that radical translation is not possible with theoretical statements but only possible with observational statements (Sogolo, 1993:27). Observational Statements are based on the immediate sensory experience of the speaker. The truth value of such statements depends on observation and verification. Theoretical statements on the other hand are based on belief systems. For instance the Azande will assert that 'twins are birds' based on the belief that twins are held in high esteem. An English speaker not from the Azande culture will find it difficult to make sense of this statement.

To hold to the position above on the impossibility of radical translation is not a ground to dismiss the exercise. According to Sogolo,

> *"It is becoming clear to some African philosophers that most of what constitutes the subject-matter of their enterprise in so far as they use alien languages, can be reduced to mere linguistic muddles or that the volume of such disputes can be thinned down through a first- order job of language analysis" (Sogolo, 1993: 30-31).*

The points that bear pointing out from the discourse above are many. First, given the problem of translation of theoretical statements, it would be wrong for an alien culture to condemn what goes on in another culture as irrational. Thus, the early attempts by early European scholars to condemn African world view based on the non-understanding of African culture is not only wrong but illogical.

Secondly, given the language problem, it is expected that scholars in various fields will be humble enough to view other cultures with a considerable degree of respect. This is what Donald

Davidson calls the "principle of Charity". Another important point is that since beliefs are mostly based on theoretical statements, then it would be wrong to super-impose the attributes of a particular culture on an alien culture.

Again, it is also the case that an adequate development of a culture is predicated on the development of the language of a people since it is the vehicle through which thought is expressed and put into action. It is then obvious that language has a vital role to play in the development of a people. Having said all this, let us talk briefly about the relation among philosophy, language and development.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have examined the question of language in African Philosophy. You considered the genesis of the language question tracing its origin to the colonial imposition of alien language on African culture and people. You also examined problems arising from the use of alien language in depicting the reality of a people's culture and how these problem can be addressed.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- The language problem in African philosophy has its genesis in the conception of philosophy as a Western enterprise.
- A number of difficult questions arise from the fact that contemporary African philosophy is conducted in foreign languages.
- Language mirrors reality

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

What are the problems emanating from the use of alien language in depicting African reality?

i.   State Quine's position on translation manual
ii.   What is the difference between theoretical statements and observational statements?
iii.   Describe the centrality of language to the development of a culture
iv.   Enumerate the implications that the language question can have for less developed culture.

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UNIT 5:   INDIVIDUAL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

The issue of social relationship is an important phenomenon in African culture. This has been construed in terms of the constitutive action of individuals in relation to the community of which they are members. In this unit, therefore, you will be introduced to the issues bordering on the relationship that exists between the individual and the community, especially in traditional African societies and we draw the implications of such relationship for contemporary African states that are in urgent quest for social order and sustainable development. You need to finally note that the individual–community relationship constitutes a major aspect of contemporary African philosophy.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Explain the role of the individual in the community
- Spell out the role of the community in shaping the attitude of the individual and the extent of the control of the individual by the community
- Identify the major theories on the individual – community relationship in Africa

3.0   Main Content

3.1.   The Link between the Community and the Individual

According to Talcott Parsons, "the personalities of members of the society are also part of its environment in the sense that the society must be able to count on its members to contribute to societal functioning" (Parsons, 1977:7). The community, no matter how viewed, is bigger and more self –sufficient than its institutional components such as the schools, business firms, religious and political institutions. In world traditional societies, the individual finds himself tied and guided by communal values, which are also regarded as social values. According to Kwame

Gyekye, communal values are "those values that express appreciation of the worth and importance of the community". (Gyekye, 1996: 35).

A community is the receptacle in which communal values flourish and it is predicated on the social being and belongingness of man. A community is usually made up of persons or group of persons linked together mainly by interpersonal bonds which are not necessarily biological. (Gyekye, 1996:35). These bonds may consist of shared common values, interests and goals. Even in contemporary political thought, community is seen as a normative concept that describes the desired level of human relationship. The community is thus construed as a body with some common values, norms and goals which are for the benefits of its individual members.

3.2.   The Radical Communitarian Theory of Person in African Philosophy

Many African intellectuals, religious and political leaders put forward the claim that (a) traditional African societies were largely communalistic and (b) that any understanding of an African person whether at the metaphysical level or socio-political level must be from the communalistic perspective. These claims boil down to a central one that a man is nothing outside his community. The advocates of the radical thesis believe that it is the community that determines the social, religious, political and moral being of man. Those in this category include, Blyden, Mbiti, Kenyetta, Nyerere, Nkrumah, Senghor, Idowu and Menkiti.

Mbiti starts his exposition of the communal theory with the question: What is the individual and where is his place in the community (Mbiti, 1981:107). According to him, the individual can only exist corporately in traditional life. This implies that he owes his existence to other people who are either living or dead. The individual is simply a part of the whole.

Mbiti stresses further that just as God made the first man, man must transcend this primitive mode of existence by making himself a corporate or social man. Therefore, "it is only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people" (Mbiti, 1981:108).

3.3   The Moderate/Restricted Communitarian Theory

The central claim of the moderate thesis is how individual values can be accommodated and protected within the community. The moderate theory, one of whose major proponents is Kwame Gyekye, recognizes that man does not live outside community and therefore has his

personhood partly determined by communal values. However, and more fundamentally there are other things apart from the community which make a human being enjoy the attribute of personhood. According to Gyekye:

> *"beside being a communitarian by nature, the human person is, also by nature other things as well. By other things, I have in mind such essential attributes of the person like rationality, having a capacity for virtue and for evaluating and making moral judgements and hence, being capable of choice. It is not the community that creates these attributes, it discovers and nurtures them"* *(Gyekye, 1992:111).*

The import of Gyekye's statements is that a person is endowed with certain attributes which are prior to community formation. It is these attributes, such as, rationality, the capacity for virtue, ability to make moral judgement, and to choose that confer personhood on the individual. Without these attributes we cannot even talk of the community. The function of the community is to discover these various attributes and nurture them to maturity in various individuals. We must note that Gyekye is using the concept of a person taking into consideration the rational and moral attributes. The moderate communitarian view agrees that man is a communal or social being by nature, However, his social being is not enough to define him because he is other things as well. Gyekye therefore believes that any attempts to refuse to recognize these individual attributes would result in pushing a person's communitarian nature beyond limits, and would thus obfuscate our understanding of the real nature of the person. (Gyekye, 1992:106).

3.4. The State and the Individual in Contemporary Africa

At least, at the theoretical level, the preceding sections have given us a veritable insight as to what kind of relationship should and ought to exist between the community and the individual. Even the African perspectives on the community-individual link have been unanimous on the belief that it is within the community that the individual can actualize his potentials and flourish which makes it obligatory for the individual to contribute towards the survival of the community, which provides his culture and by extension his cultural identity through which he can contribute to the world. The daunting question in this section would be posed in the following manner: What form has the relationship between the state and the individual in contemporary Africa taken such that in most African states sustainable development has become difficult and political,

social and economic crises have become the order of the day? Since it is only in terms of the state and the individual that we can reflect the notions of the community and individual, then we are bound to look at the causes of the present disequilibrium in most African states.

There is no doubt that the state exists for the welfare of its citizens, and the citizens also contribute towards the survival of the state. But in recent times, especially after the granting of political independence, not only has Africa witnessed the ethnic conflicts which have resulted in the failure of the state, citizenship and identity crisis and the problem of social order, African states have also had to contend with the problems of modernization and by extension globalization which have resulted in new configuration in the relationship between the community and the individual in such areas as economy, marriage and education. This challenge of modernization and globalization has brought both positive and negative impacts, but more on the negative aspects to most African states. The erosion of certain communal values as a result of the competitiveness embedded in modernization and globalization, especially through capitalism and liberal ideology of deregulation, market forces, privatization and commercialization, has brought unbridled corruption, lack of fellow feeling, greed and political crisis.

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit, you have examined in considerable details the relationship between the individual and community in traditional African communal societies. You did a conceptual analysis of the concept of community and other related concepts. You also examined the radical and moderate theories of communalism underlying the individual and community relationship in Africa. You noted that this form of relationship have implications for the state in contemporary Africa. This is because the state exists for the welfare of the citizens and the citizens also have the duty to ensure the survival of the state.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- A community is the receptacle in which communal values flourish and it is predicated on the social being and belongingness of man.

- In African philosophy, community's role or influence on the individual is rather weighty and this has pitted the philosophers into opposing camps on how to justify this influence and the individual's role in the scheme of things.

- The two opposing camps are the radicals and moderates.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

i.   Why is the community vital to the survival of the individual and vice-versa?

ii.   What is a community?

iii.   What is the nature of the relationship between individuals and community, especially in traditional African societies?

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UNIT 6:   MORALITY AND MORAL VALUES IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Contents

1.0   Introduction

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0   Main Content

    3.1.   The Notion of Moral Values

    3.2.   Moral Values and Contemporary African Society

    3.3.   Moral Values as the Basis for Social Order

4.0   Conclusion

1.0   Introduction

In this unit, you will be examining the role of morality in achieving the desirable level of social order in Africa. The reason why this is important for you derives from the fact that major challenges in contemporary African society is the problem of social order. Social order is used in the normative sense to depict normal functioning of society in such a way that individuals and institutions within the society experience development. It is the case however that it cannot be said that we have the desired level of social order in many African states. The reasons for this are legion. Some of them are bad leadership, ethnic chauvinism, bad followership, political crisis, religion crisis and corruption. It is also the case that development, sustainable one indeed, will continue to elude Africa without the desirable level of social order. You will get better handle on all this shortly.

2.0   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- Explain what morality is and what moral values are

- Identify major moral values in traditional African societies

- Understand the nexus between morality and social order

3.0   Main Content

3.1.   The Notion of Moral Values

In any human society, social interaction would not only be difficult but impossible if the people do not have a sense of right and wrong. This sense or right and wrong is important if the individual is to have the good life. In striving towards his own welfare or self-interest, the

individual is also aware that the welfare of others is as important as his and therefore must act in such a way that will ensure not only his own well–being but the well-being of the society in which he finds himself either by accident or deliberate act.

Moral values encompass those ingredients that would make a moral situation achievable. They include honesty, avoidance of greed; avoidance of lie; trust; keeping of promises when we are not presented with a dilemma; altruism, that is, placing others first, love and obedience. Although the list is inexhaustible and may vary from culture to culture, the nexus of all these values lies in the fact that they help in ensuring human well-being.

Although moral values may vary from culture to culture, there is a sense in which we can talk about universality of morality. The primary consideration for this is the rationality of man. In this regard, when we say that man is a rational being, we are implying, according to Sogolo, that there are certain things shared in common by mankind and if these traits such as love, self-reflection, honesty, sympathy and so forth, are absent in any human group, there will be doubt as to whether that group is human at all. (Sogolo, 1993: XV)

3.2. Moral Values and Contemporary African Society

Let us note also that social, communal and ethical values are intertwined in such a way that one cannot talk about one without the other. This simply underscores the fact that moral values have social origins. Bewaji poignantly describes social basis of morality thus:

> *"It is the social milieu in which competition for the scarce resources of the environment takes place. But it is not only the resources of the environmental that are scarce. The human resources of love, patronage, recognition, compassion, companionship, etc are also scarce and require deliberate efforts in both their generation and equitable distribution. Here lies the crux of the moral responsibility of society to its members and to itself. And this fact is represented in numerous ideas in African thought"* (Bewaji, 2004:397).

The extensive passage from Bewaji has a lot of implication for contemporary Africa in the sense that we in Africa are not only experiencing the dearth of material resources needed for development, we also lack the moral resources to manage the little resources we have due to what Olusegun Oladipo has described as "moral dislocation" (Oladipo, 1998). The present

situation is sharply in contrast to what prevailed in traditional African societies in which brotherly concepts such as *Ubuntu* flourished. It is true that social order exists to provide the multifarious needs of man which are necessary for a fulfilled happy life conducive for development. It is also true that social order is a condition in which society is organized to effectively provide for the needs of man. Granted that this is the case, how do we in Africa ensure the desired social order? This is where morality comes in. Interestingly morality leads to the sustenance of social order and social order can enhance not only the internalization of morality, it can also enhance its application.

3.3. Moral Values as the Basis for Social Order

We cannot forget Socrates so soon, for according to him, "the unexamined life is not worth living". Granted this, we must re-examine our moral pedigrees from the individual and state perspectives if we are to ensure the desired level of social order that will promote development in Africa. Morality presupposes human well-being both at the societal and individual levels. If this is the case, moral values are not ends in themselves as such but tools which should be tailored towards arriving at our goals.

Let us make a disclaimer at this juncture. It is not that Africans do not understand what it means to be moral and what moral values are all about. This means that inspite of Africans' knowledge of morality, state of things are not as desirable as they ought to be. The problem then is that the non-application and non-internalization of these moral values have been due largely to the inaction of the states in Africa that have foisted undue political and economic pressures on the individuals, who then have no choice but to resort to unethical means of attaining livelihood and survival.

Furthermore, we cannot overlook the role of the government and state in promoting social order which will make the proper application of moral values possible. For instance, when government derives its legitimacy through the people and not just through the military coups, kangaroo elections and one party dictatorship that have become the trade mark of most African states. This is buttressed by the fact that leadership successions through democratic process have become so difficult that most African leaders are replaced in office through coup d'états or sudden deaths.

In similar vein, government economic policies should be such that allows the unfettered development of the weakest individual in society. This seems to be the major pre-occupation of

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Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice,* (Rawls, 1971) where he argued that the state has the obligation to protect the interest and welfare of the less well-off in society. The essence of the foregoing is that since we cannot reverse the movement of capitalism in most African states, with some of its perceived threat to economic dependent ones, government can continue to foster such measures that will make it possible for the ordinary citizens to enjoy the benefit of living.

Finally, the solution to our moral problem and social order would then require re-adjustments in our attitude towards wealth, democratic values such as justice and freedom, and governance and the necessary educational orientation, which is not predicated on the fetish of material development which governments in Africa tend to encourage. Rather, it should be based more fundamentally on educational orientation, both at formal and informal levels, that develops human mind to strive for excellence, integrity, justice and happy life based on reciprocal obligation. (Oyeshile, 2006).

4.0   Conclusion

In this unit you have learned of the meaning of morality, moral values and how they help promote social amity. This is more so because of the apparent dearth of social order in most African states. You have now seen that the only way social order can be achieved in any society, nay African, is when moral values are developed and entrenched.

5.0   Summary

The following is the summary of what you have learnt in this unit:

- there is an interface between morality and social order in contemporary African society.
- people are not aware of the moral values necessary to build a good society, rather the people have not applied these moral values to daily existence as well as internalized them.
- leaders have important roles to play in engendering social order by being moral in their attitude and policies.

6.0   Tutor Marked Assignments

i.   What are some of the factors that contribute to lack of social order in Africa?

ii.   What is morality? Can morality help to address societal ills?

7.0   References/Further Readings

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