Course Code: PHL 241

Course Title: Comparative Philosophy

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Course Guide for PHL 241- Comparative Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

PHL 241: Comparative Philosophy is a two-credit unit course for students of philosophy at the 200 level. This course impacts knowledge about three major philosophical traditions namely:Western or the Euro-American, Asian and African traditions. It is expected that the knowledge of these three cultures will provide learners the cross-cultural understanding of their realities. It is also hoped that this diverse knowledge will afford learners the ability to tolerate and relate with others of different cultural backgrounds and orientations. This course-guide introduces learners to the scope and structure of the course as well as all that is required for assessment and examination.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will impact you with pieces of valuable information which you will find of use in the society. At completion, it is expected that it will introduce you to:

- Western, Asian and African philosophical traditions.

- The practice of comparative philosophy.

- Equip you with the Intellectual technique to analyse similar and contrasting ideas

Theoretically, on successful completion of this course, Learners would have had a basic understanding of:

- The philosophical world-view of Western, Asian and African cultures.

- The main concepts, themes and leading philosophical positions in the three traditions.

- The benefits and challenges of engaging with philosophical ideas in a comparative way.

Practically, on successful completion of this course, learners would have been able to:

- Explain, compare and contrast the similarities and differences among the conceptions of diverse realities in the three systems of thought.

- Discuss the three systems of thought and offer critical responses to questions in relation to some themes like morality, God, life, destiny and post-mortem states, etc.

- Appreciate and discuss the problem of cross-cultural realities.

- Utilise the knowledge of cross-cultural realities as it relates with people from different backgrounds.

Working Through the Course

In order to complete this course, it is important that you read the study units patiently and thoroughly. Where links are available, learners should also follow them to access and read, listen or watch any media recommended. Each study unit has an introduction, body, conclusion, summary and references/further readings. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit a written assignment which will be used to monitor your learning and assess your performance.

Study Units

This course contains 14 units of four modules, which are:

Module 1

Unit 1 Introducing Comparative Philosophy

Unit 2 The Development of Comparative Philosophy

Unit 3 The Positions and Challenges of doing Comparative Philosophy

Unit 4 Approaches and Methods of Comparative Philosophy

Module 2

Unit 1 Definition, History and Periodisation of African Philosophy

Unit 2 Schools of Thought and Methodologies of African Philosophy

Unit 3 Some Themes in African Philosophy

Module 3

Unit 1 Meaning and Methodologies of Western Philosophy

Unit 2 Some Themes in Western Philosophy

Unit 3 Meaning and Methodologies of Asian Philosophy

Unit 4 Some Themes in Asian Philosophy

Module 4

Unit 1 A Comparison of African and Western Philosophies

Unit 2 A Comparison of African and Asian Philosophies

Unit 3 A Comparison of Asian and Western Philosophies

References and Further Readings

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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    3.2 Nature of Comparative Philosophy

    3.3 Comparative Philosophy and Kindred Disciplines

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

This unit will give you an introduction into the course, Comparative Philosophy. You will be exposed to the basic ideas in the course beginning with the meaning and definition of comparative philosophy. You will also learn about the nature of comparative philosophy, the assumptions and the facts. This unit will further expose you to the differences between comparative philosophy and other kindred disciplines such as intercultural philosophy and world philosophy.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Understand the meaning of comparative philosophy

- Define comparative philosophy in your own terms

- Explain and discuss the nature of comparative philosophy

- Differentiate comparative philosophy from other kindred disciplines

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Meaning of Comparative Philosophy

Comparative philosophy can be defined as a sub-field of philosophy that is concerned with studying the differences and similarities among ideas in two or more philosophical traditions and evaluating the outcomes for the purposes of deepening the analysis, gaining clarity and opening new vistas for thought. It is an area of philosophy that focuses on bringing ideas and concepts from different philosophical traditions into a conversation. This conversation, among other things, aims at studying the differences and similarities of such ideas and concepts. The aim of comparative philosophy is to obtain clarity in specific areas, topics or concepts where there appears to be similarity between or among some philosophical traditions. For example, a comparative philosopher may wish to understand the difference between the concept *zhong* in Chinese

philosophy and the concept of *ezumezu* in African philosophy. These are two related concepts, the former roughly meaning 'balance' and the latter roughly meaning 'completeness.' Balance is a form of completeness and completeness is also a form of balance. A comparative philosopher may set out to study these two concepts more closely in order to identify their areas of similarity and difference and by so doing gain clarity and deeper insight.

3.2 Nature of Comparative Philosophy

Comparative philosophy is a sub-field of philosophy that studies the differences and similarities in the ideas, themes and methodologies of two or more philosophical traditions. It can be said to belong to the category of philosophy of the infrastructure. That is, those sub-fields of philosophy concerned with applying philosophy to other areas of knowledge. The infrastructural nature of comparative philosophy is seen in the comparative exercise proper in that it is the application of philosophy to a comparative task. In this discipline, ideas, concepts and theories from different philosophical traditions are compared to one another. But the question is, why do we bother to compare philosophical traditions? This is where opinions differ in the field.

 Basically, comparative exercises enable scholars to understand and fine-tune ideas better. But the extent to which the comparative philosopher should go is always at issue among philosophers. In comparative philosophy, some scholars expect philosophers to be neutral in their analysis, that is, they should not be

critical or take position on which concept or claim is better in the philosophical tradition under study. This attitude has been described as normative scepticism by Martha Nussbaum. But some others argue that this is against the norm of philosophising which demands of a philosopher to criticise, take a position and justify it. This has created a conflict in the discipline. Scholars refer to this school of thought as either 'the neutralists' or ;the conservatives'. The 'neutralists' believe that taking a position amounts to violating the duty of the comparative philosopher which ought to be respected by other traditions. Other scholars who refer to them as 'conservatives' believe that being critical and taking a position at the end of a comparative exercise does not necessarily mean that a comparative philosopher was not respectful to the other tradition; it only shows that they were being objective, impartial and dispassionate in their examination of contending views and arguments from the different philosophical traditions compared. Additionally, the conservatives would say that when a philosopher takes a position, he only provides reasoned justifications and not emotional and groundless evocations on his philosophical view. So, for the conservatives, the question of a comparative philosopher undermining his duty to respect difference in tradition before taking a position does not arise.

3.3 Comparative Philosophy and Allied Disciplines

It is important to distinguish comparative philosophy from other allied disciplines such as intercultural philosophy and world philosophy. Intercultural philosophy is simply a discipline that is concerned with creating a platform for integrating philosophical ideas from different cultures of philosophy in order to create a perspective that reflects something in those cultures involved. Some of the leading thinkers in intercultural philosophy include: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (South America), Heinz Kimmerle, Jörgen Hengelbrock and Franz Martin Wimmer (Europe), Ram Adhar Mall (Asia), Innocent Izuchukwu Asouzu and Jonathan O. Chimakonam (Africa), etc. Comparative philosophy is different from world philosophy which is about the creation of a world system of philosophy by integrating ideas from all known cultures of philosophy and traditions.

4.0 Conclusion

Comparative exercise is a technical aspect of scholarship that requires you not only to have a good knowledge of the discipline and traditions you wish to compare, but to have a good understanding of what it entails to conduct a comparative exercise in a particular discipline. Here, your focus is the field of philosophy.

In this unit, you have learned the basic ideas that underlie comparative philosophy as a discipline. Having a firm grasp of the content will enable you discuss, teach, argue and write at the introductory level of the course.

5.0 Summary

On the whole, you have been exposed to the definition and meaning of comparative philosophy as a discipline. You have also been exposed to the nature of comparative philosophy and what the expectations are for the comparative philosopher. The positions of the neutralists and the conservatives have been explained. Further, you have also learnt the difference between comparative philosophy and other similar disciplines such as intercultural philosophy and world philosophy that are commonly mistaken or confused to be the same.

6.0 References/Further Reading

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UNIT 2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you will be exposed to the historical development of comparative philosophy as a subfield of philosophy. You will learn about the initial inspiration and the eventual efforts made by those who published the first work on the subject. You will also learn about the substantial development in the field after the end of the Second World War.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Understand the historical evolution of comparative philosophy as a sub-field of philosophy

- Explain and discuss the initial inspiration and the influence of the Second World War on the development of the field.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Development of Comparative Philosophy

The idea of comparative philosophy began to take shape late in the nineteenth century. In 1899 to be precise, the Indian philosopher called Brajendranath Seal thought that mainstream ideas in scholarship could be contextualised, whether in history or philosophy or some other disciplines. His thinking was that cultural influences are at the root of some of these academic exercises. Philosophy for example, might be a universal discipline, but there is always a twist in that its questions, most times, are conditioned and inspired by cultural experiences. Realising the importance of the cultural origins of philosophies, Seal suggests, will make the idea of comparative philosophy significant. As an example, Seal demonstrates his proposal by comparing Vaishnavism and Christian thought with the aim of identifying their differences and similarities. As elementary as this idea was at the time, it was an important development in the history of philosophy which provided a new approach that not only allowed philosophers to rethink cross cultural realities but to gain clarity in the thoughts they study.

By 1923, Paul Masson-Oursel published his book titled *Comparative Philosophy* which marked the beginning of comparative philosophy as a sub-

field of philosophy. The basic ideas that underlie comparative philosophy are a) the recognition of the rights of other peoples and cultures to philosophise, b) the recognition of the immanence of reason in every culture, c) the recognition that philosophy is not provincialised, and that it can be practised everywhere, d) the recognition that one of the ways to gain clarity, deepen understanding and extend the frontiers of knowledge is to bring related ideas in different philosophical traditions into a comparative study, e) the respect for all cultures in philosophy. Once you realise that the above is true, it becomes easy for you to understand the goal and importance of comparative philosophy.

At the end of the Second World War in which about 70-85 million people died, some 3% of the 1940 world population, it became clear that to avert such global and even regional catastrophes, cultures of the world would have to relate more closely. Comparative philosophy is one of the intellectual fronts that afford such cross-cultural engagements. A number of scholars from different cultures have stood out in the promotion of comparative philosophy and they include; Roger Ames, Wilmal Dissanayake, Thomas Kasulis, Gene Blocker, Alasdair MacIntyre, Graham Parkes, Byran Van Norden, Li Chenyang, and S. Radahkrishan, to name but a few.

4.0 **Conclusion**

History is very important in any human endeavour. In academics, it helps to provide background information and chronicle the evolution or development of the a field of study. In this unit, you have been exposed to the historical

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development of comparative philosophy. It is expected that the knowledge of the field's history will be helpful to you in increasing understanding and interest in comparative exercises in philosophy.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have learned the historical origin of comparative philosophy. You have also learned the influence and background inspiration that led to the development of the field. Further, you have learned of the first set and second set of thinkers who led and worked out the scope of the field. This knowledge prepares you for the next unit that focuses on the challenges of doing comparative philosophy.

6.0 References/Further Reading

Littlejohn, Ronnie. "Comparative Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.* James Fieser and Bradley Dowden Eds. See link: https://www.iep.utm.edu/comparat/

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UNIT 3 MAIN POSITIONS AND CHALLENGES OF DOING COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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    3.2 Challenges of doing Comparative Philosophy
4.0 Conclusion
5.0 Summary
6.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 Introduction

In this unit, the three main positions that herald discussions on comparative philosophy are discussed. It is important for you to know that these positions characterise the orientation of different scholars regarding the significance or otherwise of setting up comparative philosophy as a sub-field of philosophy. Some of the fallouts from these positions eventually constitute the challenges of doing comparative philosophy. These challenges are also discussed in this unit.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

At the end of this course, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Understand and discuss the main positions which philosophers took regarding the significance of comparative philosophy as a field

- Understand and discuss the challenges of doing comparative philosophy

- Offer personal critical insight on the challenges of doing comparative philosophy

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Main Positions

It is important to point out that there are three main positions that define the reaction of philosophers on the idea of comparative philosophy. These are intellectual denigration, intellectual charity and intellectual concession.

In the first position, philosophers such as Georg Hegel, Immanuel Kant, David Hume and Lucien Levy-Bruhl, Antony Flew, to name only a few, dismissed philosophical culture in the south as unworthy of the name philosophy. While some of the actors held that people in the south like those from the sub-Saharan Africa do not have the rational capacity to practise philosophy, others regard the cultures of philosophy from the south like China and India as mere cultural wisdom that lack the rudiments of critical rigour. Under this circumstance where philosophers from one culture denigrate the cultures of philosophy from other places, it is difficult to talk about comparative philosophy.

In the second position, some scholars like Alexander Goldenweiser, Peter Winch, Harry Barnes, Tempels Placid, etc., take a charitable stance. They hold that some cultures of philosophy, especially those in the south may not be as critical and rigorous as those in the West but they have their own standard. It may be construed as sub-standard or even supernatural by philosophers in the West, it has its own logic. This is why Goldenweiser (1922) says that "supernaturalism as a system of ideas is in itself perfectly reasonable". And Barnes (1965) declares "Grant primitive man his premises and he could often draw logical conclusions. He was by no means so absolutely devoid of logic as philosophers like Lucien Levy-Bruhl have imagined". What the scholars who hold the second position seem to agree on is that the philosophical traditions in the south may not be as strong as those in the West but it is still a philosophy. The implication of the second position on comparative philosophy is that a truly balanced comparative study cannot take place because there is a salient recognition that the cultures involved are not on the same pedestal. In other words, even though some philosophers in the West who hold the second position gave a charitable interpretation to the cultures of philosophy in the South, what is required in comparative philosophy is respect to other philosophical culture not charity.

For the third position, there is a blend between philosophers in the West and the South. These set of philosophers hold that cultures of philosophy may vary in terms of the questions that inspire them and the logic that undergird them but

they have the same pedigree. Here, you will find philosophers such Martha Nussbaum, Bruce Janz, C. S. Momoh, Innocent I. Asouzu, Jonathan O. Chimakonam, etc. This position provides ground for a proper comparative study to take place between ideas in different cultures of philosophy. This is premised on the ground that each culture deserves respect and recognition in the practice of philosophy. With this position in mind, it is easy to conceive comparative philosophy not only as a sub-field of philosophy but as a worthwhile exercise where philosophers get the chance to study what their colleagues in other traditions are doing and compare them with the ideas in their own culture in order to gain insight into what happens in other cultures.

3.2 Challenges of doing Comparative Philosophy

The conflict amongst the three positions discussed above appears to create a tension that spills over into the practice of comparative philosophy proper. This tension eventually re-emerges to pose some challenges for the comparative philosopher, some of which include: chauvinism, scepticism, incommensurability and perenialism.

   a) Chauvinism has two types as identified by Martha Nussbaum (1997), namely: descriptive and normative.

   i.   Descriptive chauvinism, on the one hand, involves an attempt to read, interpret or present ideas in other philosophical traditions from the perspective of a different philosophical tradition, usually the one the presenter is familiar with. It is an attempt to cast view

from a given tradition particularly, the tradition one belongs to. For example, when a Western scholar tries to interpret Ifeanyi Menkiti's Afro-communitarianism (African philosophy) in the light of Charles Taylor's communitarian views (Western philosophy). It does not necessarily mean that both systems pursue the same communitarian agenda or that the former can be read as an interpretation of the later.

ii. Normative chauvinism, on the other hand, involves a divisive orientation of self and other dichotomy. It is the thinking which is prevalent in philosophical where those from a more developed tradition, usually the Western tradition, imagine a difference between their tradition and the rest of other traditions. They think of this difference in terms of superior and inferior, standard and non-standard, rigorous and non-rigorous, strong and weak, and where they see their own philosophical tradition as good and standard, they regard the rest as bad and non-standard. Nussbaum (1997) argues that this mindset is inimical to any serious comparative analysis. Other philosophers that share this vision include Roger Ames, Innocent Asouzu, Tsenay Serequeberhan, Bruce Janz and Jonathan O. Chimakonam.

b) Another challenge of comparative philosophy is what Nussbaum described as normative scepticism. This is an attitude by which a

comparative philosopher suspends his judgment. This attitude could be traced back to the ancient period of Western philosophy where some of the sophists like Gorgias of Leontinoi, Pyrrho, Cratylus, Arcesilaus, etc., were the major exponents of scepticism. Pyrrhonists specifically, recommended what is called epoché or suspension of judgement. According to one of the exponents of pyrrhonism Sextus Empiricus (1933), Epoché "is a state of the intellect on account of which we neither deny nor affirm anything."

Gorgias, on his part states that "nothing exists, even if anything exists, we could not know it and even if we could know it, we could not communicate it" (Kerferd 1955). So, it is better to suspend our judgement. The comparative philosopher who is comparing ideas from two different traditions, for example, Jan Lukasiewicz's three valued logic in the Western tradition and Jonathan O. Chimakonam's Ezumezu logic in the African tradition, would be guilty of normative scepticism if they decide to merely present the summary of the two theories without deploying the tool of critical assessment and passing judgement. It is in criticising the theories that redunda *Descriptive chauvinism* ncies can be identified and removed, and the ideas with regard to their areas of similarities and differences can be fine-tuned.

c) Incommensurability is another challenge facing the comparative philosopher. Due to the volume of literature in different philosophical

traditions, the comparative philosopher is under pressure to cover a range of work which is a very difficult task. As a result, either the methodological or the epistemological, ethical and metaphysical commensurability of two raditions under comparison is hard to establish or established hastily without a thorough understanding and analysis.

So, incommensurability is a challenge at both methodological level and at theoretical level. Methodologically, you would want to ask, what method is ideal for comparative philosophy? The one developed in tradition A or the one developed in tradition B? Or, do you need a neutral method? If you choose any of the three above, there is still one question; how do you know that your method can consistently marshal arguments and deliver uniform responses in all the traditions of philosophy under comparison? The answer is that you do not know, and that is the crux of the methodological incommensurability in comparative philosophy.

Similarly, there is a challenge of theoretic incommensurability. This involves the possibility of a concept in a given tradition translating to, or meaning the same thing or having the same sense or reference in another tradition compared with. What are the chances for example, that 'truth,' 'justice,' 'right,' 'freedom,' etc., as discussed in Western philosophy will have the same meaning in African philosophy? Bertrand Russell writes about the fabled encounter between the Duke of She (a Western monarch) and Confucius (an Eastern intellectual). They wanted to describe what

'uprightness' meant in their various cultures. Duke of She reported that they had an upright man in their country. His father stole a sheep and he bore witness against him. But Confucius frowned at this description. Uprightness, according to Confucius, consists in a son covering the shame of his father and not in exposing it.

Thus whether in ethics, epistemology, metaphysics and so on, you would want to ask; what are the chances that ideas and concepts in one tradition would harmonise with similar ones in another tradition? The answer is that such is difficult.

However, this minor setback does not mean that you should abandon comparative philosophy. No. As a matter of fact, this type of challenge is a stimulant that draws attention to the importance of cross-cultural engagement and understanding. If it is not easy for us to harmonise our views across cultural epistemic borders without conflict of method and theory, then, it is because there are deep layers of meanings and fundamental nuances that characterise each philosophical tradition. These nuances, whatever they may be, highlight the properties of difference and diversity, which by the way can be reckoned as forms of strengths rather than weaknesses in comparative philosophy. It can be stated simply that without diversity, the idea of comparative philosophy may not make much sense.

4.0 Conclusion

Comparative philosophy is not only an interesting sub-field of philosophy, it has emerged to show that through comparative analysis, deeper insight and clarity could be gained on issues of concern that characterise the orientation of philosophy in different traditions. It is expected that you would be able to utilise knowledge gained from this course not only in academics but in the practical issues about life. Sometimes, we gain better understanding and are able to make better judgements when we consider other people's perspective in addition to ours.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been exposed to two important issues in comparative philosophy, i.e. the main positions that herald discussions on comparative philosophy and the challenges of doing comparative philosophy. These two main issues were discussed and analysed in two separate sections.

6.0 References/Further Reading

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UNIT 4 APPROACHES AND METHODS OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0 Main Content

    3.1 Approaches to Comparative Studies

    3.2 Methods of doing Comparative Philosophy

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 Introduction

One thing is to admit that comparative philosophy is a sub-field of philosophy and another is to sort out the issues surrounding its methodology. In other words, it is not enough to identify the benefits and significance of the course, you must understand the technicalities involved in the way comparative philosophy is done. Some of these technicalities involve approaches and methods. In this unit, you will be exposed to the various approaches involved in comparative study. You will also be exposed to the different methods that can be used to do comparative philosophy.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

At the end of this course, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Understand, explain and discuss the various approaches to doing comparative study

- Understand, explain and discuss the various methods for doing comparative philosophy

- Offer your own critical insight on the various approaches and methods of comparative philosophy

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Approaches to Comparative Study

There are a number of approaches to doing comparative study. These approaches must however be distinguished from the methods of comparative philosophy. J. Kwee Swan Liat highlighted and discusses eight approaches according to the inclination of different disciplines where comparative seven because the approach he calls 'comparative approach' simply begs the question. These approaches which represent different perspectives include: 1) Philological approach: this is concerned with language and the removal of barriers that may be imposed in knowledge acquisition across borders. Those who employ this approach are philologists and linguists who are concerned with arrangement of texts and their translations into other languages. 2) The historical approach: This involves gathering of sources in different cultures, putting them into historical perspectives, checking dates and tracing the evolution of ideas in different cultures. The historians are mainly the ones that adopt this approach in comparative studies in their field. 3) Formal-evaluative approach: This involves a critical and analytical study of ideas in different philosophical traditions. This approach is favoured by philosophers. 4) The psychological approach is a perspective adopted by psychologists and

psychoanalysts to understand the psychographics (the different ways people in different cultures think or view the world) of different cultures under comparison. 5) The phenomenological approach is another approach favoured by philosophers following the works of some German idealists notable among whom was Edmund Husserl. Here, they attempt to study different culture's conceptions of reality. 6) The sociological and anthropological approaches are twin approaches usually adopted by sociologists and anthropologists. They seek to study and compare cultural ideas about the structure of the society and the nature of human beings across cultural borders. 7) The total-integrativist approach is an approach that seeks to take into account different aspects of life and society when comparing different cultures and this is one approach that is favoured interdisciplinary researchers.

3.2 Methods of Comparative Philosophy

On the whole, it should be borne in mind that no matter the approach a comparative philosopher has adopted, there is still a need for a method to guide the exercise. On account of this, we shall discuss four methods developed in different philosophical traditions:

a) The analytic method: This method was developed following the works of the British empiricists, modern logicians and the logical positivists. It defines a way of doing philosophy that centres on language analysis which seeks to eliminate errors of language such as ambiguity and

vagueness. In this way, philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein's suggestion emphasizing clear language communication in philosophy would be of relevance. This method breaks down ideas from complex to simple and from macro to micro thereby identifying flaws and logically clarifying thought as A. J. Ayer explains. The comparative philosopher that uses this method in studying ideas and concepts in different traditions attempts to arrive at meaning that is not muddied. The problem with this method in comparative philosophy however is that it very often leads to the challenge of chauvinism discussed earlier. Users of this method often find themselves forcing ideas in other traditions to fit the shape of Anglo-American philosophy, failure of which leads to the denigration of non-Western philosophies as sub-standard as we often see in literature.

b) The phenomenological method: This is an existential and substantive way of studying reality which was developed and applied by some German philosophers such as Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, etc. Here, realities are studied as they are by describing, interpreting and understanding the meanings and experiences of life. One challenge that confronts the comparative philosopher that adopts this method is incommensurability. In crossing cultural borders as one seeks to study and compare nuances in basic concepts of life, meaning and reality which inevitably characterise different philosophical traditions, the comparative philosopher would have to deal with the difficulties of establishing lines

of similarities and difference in the philosophical thinking of different cultures.

c) The hormonising method: Many cultures in Asia have the tendency to see unity as the central idea in human thought. They talk about balance, harmony and common destiny. The idea that our world, in some way, is united or can be united characterise the philosophical thinking from India to China and Japan. For lack of a better description, that way of doing philosophy is here described as the harmonising method. A comparative philosopher that adopts this method primarily seeks to identify and draw attention to the heritage which different cultures of philosophy share in common. The danger is that such a comparative philosopher often falls into the pitfall of focussing too much on the similarities paying little or no attention to the differences that may exist between two different philosophical traditions. Ultimately, this method enables the philosopher to compare but hardly supports any critical and evaluative exercise.

d) The conversational method: This is a method that traces its roots to the African philosophy tradition. Developed and endorsed by the Conversational School of Philosophy whose memberships cuts across some universities in Africa. It is an African philosophy society that aims at promoting African philosophy and intellectual history. The method they developed prioritises critical and creative conversation based on the principles of benoke and creative struggle. In comparing two different

philosophical traditions, this method through the regulative benoke principle ensures that the focus is not too much on establishing similarities or differences; and through the principle of creative struggle which purveys the motion or direction of the exercise, it ensures that the comparison is objective, critical and evaluative. The goal is not only to sustain such an encounter but to see to it that new insights and concepts are born, new ideas generated and new vistas opened. This method ensures that philosophy grows and refreshes itself by pitting the best ideas in different traditions against one another. The challenge that would likely confront a comparative philosopher who uses this method is incommensurability but this can only spice up the exercise.

4.0 Conclusion

The approaches discussed in this unit provides the learner with the knowledge that comparative studies can also be done and are actually being done in other disciplines besides philosophy. The methods however are specifically about the way philosophers from divergent traditions go about the business of comparative philosophy. It is expected that the learner would have gained deeper understanding of some technical issues involved in comparative philosophy as a course.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have learnt the various approaches involved in comparative studies. These approaches point to different disciplinary inclination of comparative scholars from sociology and anthropology to philosophy and other disciplines. Also, you have learned about some of the methods that can be used to conduct research in comparative philosophy. Care has been taken to identify and discuss methods from the three traditions that command the focus of this course namely, Western, Asian and African philosophical traditions.

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Module 2

Unit 1 Definition, History and Periodisation of African Philosophy

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1.0 Introduction

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would have been able to define

African philosophy and trace the historical development of systematic African

philosophy from the early period to the contemporary period. You have also learnt about the main viewpoints that characterised each of the periods in the history of African philosophy. African philosophy is one of the major traditions in philosophy. Other traditions include Asian or oriental tradition within which we have sub-traditions as the Chinese, Indian, Japanese, etc. there is the Western tradition within which we have sub-traditions as continental and the analytic traditions. African philosophy is still nascent and as a result, is yet to split into sub-traditions. But as the first quarter of the 21st century winds up, the conversational philosophy is showing signs consistent with a sub-tradition. It might take another decade for anyone to be able to say for sure that it is the first sub-tradition to emerge within the big umbrella of African philosophy tradition.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would have been able to:

- Define African philosophy in your own terms.

- Possess a working knowledge of the history of African philosophy.

- Explain and discuss the various periods that characterise systematic African philosophy.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Defining African Philosophy

Defining African philosophy is a difficult thing. For some African philosophers, African philosophy is simply done by Africans (Hountondji, 1996). He states that "By 'African philosophy' I mean a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves…. concerned solely with the philosophical intention of the authors, not with the degree of its effective realization, which cannot easily be assessed." (Hountondji 1996, 33). So, for African philosophers such as Paulin Hountondji, African philosophy is delineated into a discipline of texts produced by Africans and intended to be philosophical.

However, this definition is quite restrictive. For one thing, it is possible to agree that individuals who are originally from outside Africa (Like Placide Tempels, Barry Halen, Bruce Janz) can be referred to as African philosophers and, secondly, arguments about the value of oral philosophical literature can also be made. There is also a related idea that African philosophy is a discourse about specific African issues which can be produced even by non-Africans in so far as they are versed in African life world (Oruka 1979, 50). For others, African philosophy must involve some reflection on ethnophilosophy or a relational ontology (Mangena, 2014; Ogbonnaya, 2018). The reason for this is simple. It is plausible to suggest that much of what is contemporary Africa – and by extension, African philosophy – has been compromised by Western intellectual hegemony. For this reason, only precolonial African thought can be described as

authentically African. thus, what is real African philosophy is one that excavates philosophical ideas from Africa's precolonial past (ethnophilosophy). It is important to note that much of this excavated philosophy generally points to a relational ethics and ontology. However, the problem with this definition is that it denies the true claim that ethnophilosophy and/or relationality are only aspects of African philosophy.

Thaddeus Metz in describing African ethics states that "By "African ethics" I mean values associated with the largely black and Bantu speaking peoples indigenous to the sub-Saharan part of the continent, thereby excluding Islamic Arabs in North Africa and white settlers in Southern Africa, among others." (Metz, 2017: 97). North African is excluded from this categorisation, insofar as the philosophy being talked about was influenced by Arab and Islamic thought. White settlers in Southern Africa were also excluded mainly because the philosophy emanating from that quarter would have been influenced by European philosophies.

From this definition, one can cull a plausible definition of African philosophy. In view of this, one can describe African philosophy as the body of philosophical literature, whether oral, written or otherwise, characteristically indigenous to and about sub-Saharan part of the continent, excluding Islamic Arabs in North Africa and European settlers in Southern Africa. The conversational school of philosophy, a bourgeoning movement in African

philosophy have defined African philosophy from a new perspective, bringing the the ideas of logic and method. For the school, 'African philosophy is that tradition that critically engages with questions generated in the African place in a universalizable way and through methodological frameworks that are grounded in a prototype African logic' (Chimakonam 2015, Chimakonam and Nweke 2018, Egbai and Chimakonam 2019). You notice that for the Conversational school, method is what distinguishes one tradition of philosophy from another. And background logic that undergirds a method is what distinguishes one major tradition say, western tradition from another say, oriental tradition. On the whole, the issue of definition of African philosophy has been dealt with under the rubric of the 'Africanness or criteria question.' Some good and comprehensive discussions of this subject matter can be found in Uduma (2014), Chimakonam (2015 and 2019). You are expected to utilise the resources provided here to come up with your own definition of African philosophy.

3.2 History and Periodisation of African philosophy

African philosophy like philosophy, generally, is an offspring of wonder, curiosity and intellectual rebellion (see More 1996). If this is the case, then pinpointing the very beginning of the enterprise is an infinitely difficult matter. However, the origin of African philosophy, at least systematic African philosophy, can be traced to reactions from the accusations of pre-logicality and

the denial of the possibility of any philosophy emanating from sub-Saharan Africa. Reactions to these criticisms have shown that it is safe to assume that contrary to the views of some ancient traditional Western thinkers, Ancient Africans could and did do philosophy. It is these responses that kickstarted the development of systematic African philosophy. The lack of *written* literature and the fact that historical names cannot be pointed to when we describe African philosophy (the same way Descartes and Plato were pointed at in the Western tradition) is often seen as proof that the last claim is false.

However, whereas some of the corpora of Ancient African philosophy is unwritten, there is no doubt that oral versions of this corpus are amply available via proverbs, folktales and the like. This oral literature and the ethnophilosophical excavations that follow are often believed to bear the same legitimacy as the work of Socrates, who had no written work. Asouzu (2004) has gone as far as to describe the authors of this oral literature as "Anonymous Traditional African Philosophers".

From this corpus of knowledge, African scholars began to develop new ideas and theories such as communalism, African Socialism or Ujamaa, Consciencism, ideas about personhood, etc. Fast forward to the 20th century, we encounter what Chimakonam (2014), in his entry on the Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, called systematic African philosophy as contrasted to

unsystematic African philosophy. While the later is the epoch that ranged from distance past up to the beginning of the 20th century and mired in controversies such as lack of documentation, the former is the epoch that began from the dawn of the 20th century to the present. Within the context of the systematic epoch, one can divide African philosophy into four main periods viz: the early period, middle period, later period and the new era.

It is important to mention that this division is the model endorsed by the conversational school of philosophy. There are other models chiefly patterned after the historiography of western philosophy. These other models adopt the ancient, mediaval, modern and contemporary format. The difference among these other models is that while one group pattern the historiography of African philosophy exactly after that of western philosophy, another employed the same periodisation but spread the divisions between the 20th and the 21st centuries. The conversational school criticise the first group as copycats and insincere and the second group as copycats and naïve. Detailed discussions on the subjects of historiography and periodisation of African philosophy can be found in (James 1954, Omoregbe 1998, Onyewuenyi 1993, Hallen 2002, Okoro 2004, Abanuka 2011, Chimakonam 2014). For its clarity, the model of the conversational school would be discussed here.

The Early Period

There are two main schools that emerged and thrived in this period namely, Ethnophilosophy and Nationalist/Ideological schools. While the first excavated African worldview materials and presented such as African philosophy, the second excavated the worldview materials and used such as resources for formulating African social and political ideologies. The early period roughly encompasses the first half of the 20th century. This period was motivated by three main problems. The pejorative views in Western scholarship which presented Africans as sub-humans replete in the works of Western philosophers such as Georg Hegel (1975), Immanuel Kant (1991), David Hume (Popkin 1977-78), etc; the accusations of African pre-logicality by Western scholars (Levy-bruhl, 1932; More, 1996) and the perceived loss of the authentic African identity felt by Africans of the time – mainly due to slavery, colonialism, racialism and their attendant effects. In a bid to respond to these issues, African philosophers of this period sought to excavate (from traditional literature) and present ancient African philosophical views in a bid to show that traditional Africans were rational and also recover from these traditional views, authentic Africanness. Here, Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*, Kagame's *The Bantu-Rwandan Philosophy*, John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nyerere's *Uhuru na Ujamaa: Freedom and Socialism,* and *Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism*, Leopold Senghor's *Negritude et Humanisme* and *Negritude and the Germans* etc., are good examples of intellectual work from this period. From the

above, you would see that the emphasis is describing a philosophy that is both African and traditional.

The Middle Period

This is the era of the Great Debate in the history of African philosophy. The debate was about whether African philosophy actually exists. There are five schools that thrived in this period namely, those disparaged as ethnophilosophy school but who prefer to be identified as the traditionalist or particularist school, their rivals who identified as the universalists, modernists or professional school, comprising of philosophers who were mainly trained in the west. The debate was between these two groups. The first arguing that African philosophy was embedded in the African culture and worldview and the second arguing that what was embedded in African worldview and culture was at best ethnophilosophical materials and not philosophy in a rigorous sense. The other three schools namely, philosophic sagacity, literary and hermeneutic schools emerged mainly to substantiate the claim of the traditionalists and ingratiate the universalist's ideas. They attempted to add analytic rigour to worldview corpus in their preferred ways in order to create authentic African philosophy.

Some of the main actors of this period include, Paulin Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Innocent Onyewuenyi, Henry Olela, Peter Bodunrin, C.S. Momoh, Odera Oruka, Tsenay Serequeberhan, Chinua Achebe, Okot P'Btek, Ngugi wa

Thiong'o, Theophilus Okere, etc. For the universalists who were opposed to the existence of African philosophy, claimed that ethnophilosophical enterprise is an inadequate type of philosophy – in fact, it was hardly philosophical (Hountondji, 1996). The rush to prove the existence of ancient African philosophy, in response to Western criticism, allowed for the reifying of folk wisdom to the status of philosophy. In other words, all and anything considered a traditional view was portrayed as philosophy, whereas this was not supposed to be the case. Attempts to prove this to be the case, for the universalists, would amount to a mislabelling of (at best) African folk wisdom as African philosophy and/or equating the two. The tensions between these two groups, the traditionalists and the universalists led to the great debate about existence, status and nature of African Philosophy.

The Later Period

This period generally covers the era between the late 1980s to the late 1990s. Having deconstructed the edifice which the traditionalists built as mere ethnophilosophy, the universalists were confronted with the challenge of building authentic African philosophy to which they offered nothing. The traditionalists, buoyed by the works of the hermeneutical, literary and philosophic sagacity schools capitalised on the failure of the universalists to offer anything in place of ethnophilosophy, to declare that the universalists could not prove that African philosophy does not exist. Thus, following the

protracted debate that yielded no new systems, a period of disillusionment set in. One prominent idea at this stage was that at least, new systems were required, but who would build it was a challenge. Two movements quickily emerged to salvage the situation namely, the reconstructionists and the ecclectics. While the first sought to build new and rigorous systems from the scratch utilising the tools of logic and critical analysis, the second preferred taking relevant resources from the universalist (critical rigour) and the traditionalist (worldview corpus) camps to synthesise new systems for African philosophy. The failure of the reconstructionists meant that the ecclectics dominated the period. It is around this period that the eclectic school became quite active. This school presumed that to do African philosophy, a merger of some sort between the African Tradition and the Western tradition was necessary. Active philosophers in this period include the likes of Andrew Uduigwomen, Kwasi Wiredu, V. Y. Mudimbe, Olusegun Oladipo, etc.

The New Era (Contemporary Period)

This period roughly spans from the early 2000s till date. Philosophers in this period have sought not only to creatively proffer new and original ideas and aimed to move past perverse dialogue about African philosophy but actually *do* African philosophy by building systems. The dominant school in this era is the conversational school. Within the auspices of this conversational framework, you would see the development of original African philosophies such as

Ibuanyidanda (Complementary) philosophy by Innocent Asouzu, Harmonious Monism by Chris Ijiomah, Consolationism by Ada Agada and Conversational Philosophy by Jonathan Chimakonam. Beyond the Conversational School, other prominent African scholars within this period include Thaddeus Metz and his work on African relational ethics and a host of others who work on personhood, ubuntu and Afro-communitarianism, etc. This era is still ongoing and covers much of what is called "contemporary African philosophy utilising the conversational tool as framework for African philosophising.

4.0 Conclusion

Understanding the history and development of African philosophy, especially systematic African philosophy, is important if one must understand the contemporary trajectory of the discipline today. Thus, in this unit, tracing the initial contentions that allowed for the development of systematic African philosophy as well as the various ideas that have characterised the different periods of African philosophy has allowed you a glimpse into the nature of African philosophy.

5.0 Summary

All in all, you have been exposed to the definition and meaning of African philosophy as a discipline. You have also been exposed to the historical development of African philosophy and an understanding of the various periods of African philosophy. The position of the neutralists and the conservatives were explained. Further, you have also learned the characteristic view of each of these periods.

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Unit 2 Schools of Thought and Methodologies of African Philosophy

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1.0 Introduction

Throughout the history of African philosophy, there have been some prominent schools of thought and in this unit of the module, you would be exposed to these schools of thoughts in some depth – with special reference to the: ethnophilosophy school, national ideological school, hermeneutic school, sage school, professional school and the conversational school (Chimakonam, 2014). Beyond this, we shall also examine the prevalent methodologies in African philosophy.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Show an understanding of the schools of thought in African philosophy.
- Explain the tenets of the predominant methodologies of African philosophy.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Schools of Thought in African Philosophy

Ethnophilosophy school

The ethnophilosophy school – so named by Paulin Hountondji (1996) – stands as, perhaps, the earliest school in *systematic* African philosophy. This school is characterised by its excavationist agenda and the importance placed on ancient traditional African ideas as purveyors of African Philosophical knowledge. This school fully came into being with Placide Tempels' (1959) work on *Bantu Philosophy*. Tempels, a Belgian missionary, sought to crystallize what he understood as the characteristic thinking of the Bantu peoples of central Africa. Within this framework, he described the Bantu theory of vital force. For him, vital force can be described as an ethereal or spiritual substance that permeates all of reality. He goes on further to state that:

> This supreme value is life, force, to live strongly, or vital force. The Bantu say, in respect of a number of strange practices in which we see neither rime nor reason, that their purpose is to acquire life, strength or vital force, to live strongly, that they are to make life

stronger, or to assure that force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity…(Tempels, 1959: 2).

Thus, Tempels described a force-based ontology that not only described the way Bantu understood being, but also described their ethics – and he did this with the tool of ethnophilosophy. However, this view still remains a debated topic in African philosophy today. Some African philosophers, like Hountondji (1996), Asouzu (2007), were quick to disagree with his generalisations and even find them dangerous. For Asouzu (2007), Tempels' view led to the assumption that all Africans thought the same way or believed the same things – what he calls the "Tempelsian damage". However, there is little or no doubt that his work on Bantu philosophy, laid the foundation for ethnophilosophy as we know it today.

Today, ethnophilosophy is still active with philosophers ranging from Alexis Kegame, John Mbiti, Odera Oruka, to Fainos Mangena seen in different ways as proponents of this school. The ethnophilosophy school came under heavy fire during the middle period of African philosophy for its seeming reification of certain African myths, folklores, proverbs and the likes to the status of philosophy. Beyond this, by simply describing traditional views, not only are strong criticisms of the presented view rare, individual philosophers themselves are not culpable to criticism since the ideas they present are addressed from a long-gone tradition. Despite these criticisms, the ethnophilosophy school is seen by some contemporary African philosophers such as Ada Agada (2013) and L.

Uchenna Ogbonnaya (2018) as the foundation of African philosophy. In the contemporary period, the Zimbabwean conversationalist Fainos Mangena (2014, 2019) has emerged as perhaps the most vocal exponent of ethnophilosophy. Recently, a symposium was published in *Filosofia Theoretica: Juornal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions Vol 8, No 2, 2019,* where some seven contemporary African philosophers re-visited and debated the question of ethnophilosophy. The symposium was titled "Are we finished with the question of Ethnophilosophy: A Multi-perspective Conversation." You are encouraged to read the symposium.

Nationalist/ideological school

A descendant of the ethnophilosophical school, the Nationalist/ideological school sought to search through African history and derive from there nationalist and ideological schemes that were supposed to spark nationalism in colonial Africa, and eventually, ignite the political and socio-economic prosperity of newly independent African states. Scholars and political statesmen such as Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, etc., who were also nationalists and political leaders in their various countries came up with their own ideologies and political philosophies inspired by western socialism but grounded in African communalistic worldviews. These were meant to serve as ideological frameworks for the liberation of Africa from the shackles of

colonialism and better the welfare of their people. It is within this school that philosophies such as Consciencism, Negritude and Ujamaa were born.

Consciencism was developed by the Ghanaian philosopher and statesman Kwame Nkrumah. In his view, consciencism is an ideology whose starting point is that special type of materialism that acknowledges the internal struggle that exists in all Africans and the need for that struggle to forge and retain an African conscience (Nkrumah 1970, 79). From this African conscience emerges an egalitarian or socialist ethic that considers "The cardinal ethical principle of philosophical consciencism [the need] to treat each man as an end in himself and not merely as a means" (Nkrumah, 1970: 95). Nkrumah (1970:117-118) finds consciencism applicable to all African countries.

> Philosophical consciencism is a general philosophy which admits of application to any country. But it is especially applicable to colonies and newly independent and developing countries. In the case of Africa, by means of the foregoing set theoretic methods the necessity of a union of independent African states is established, a union integrated by socialism, without which our hard-won independence may yet be perverted and negated by a new colonialism.

From the above, we see that beyond mere applicability, Nkrumah also considers consciencism as evidence for the necessity of African unity. He states:

> Negritude was etymologically derived from the word *negre* (a discriminatory term in French for black individuals). In using the word to describe their philosophy/ideology, Senghor as well as his fellow co-developers of the concept, Léon Gontran Damas and Aime Cesaire) thought to redefine the word to mean something positive. (Diagne, 2018: NP)

Negritude was, therefore, considered as a means for the black man to not only commandeer and change the historical baggage associated with blackness, it was also a means of *living* in that history. As Cesaire posits,

> "Négritude, in my eyes, is not a philosophy. Négritude is not a metaphysics. Négritude is not a pretentious conception of the universe. It is a way of living history within history: the history of a community whose experience appears to be … unique, with its deportation of populations, its transfer of people from one continent to another, its distant memories of old beliefs, its fragments of murdered cultures. How can we not believe that all this, which has its own coherence, constitutes a heritage?" (Diagne, 2018).

For Sartre in "Black Orpheus", Negritude constituted an affirmation of blackness, a commandeering of the racial gaze and an anti-racist racism (Sartre & MacCombie, 1964). It is important to note that the idea of vital force played a huge role in the metaphysics of negritude (especially Cesaire's version of it). Thus, within that framework the shared possession of vital force and the need to constantly increase one's vital force played a greater role in defining what it meant to be human in a seemingly "white" world.

Ujamaa, on the other hand, was developed by the Tanzanian statesman, Julius Nyerere. The word, a Swahili word roughly meaning familyhood, played on the close-knit communal relationships between members of a certain kindred to develop a variant of socialism referred to as "African Socialism" or "Ujamaa".

The underlying claim in Ujamaa philosophy is the claim that precolonial African were socialist in nature. Every individual worked and no individual had the sole control of resources – resources were shared. Thus, in a bid to reclaim that heritage and deny the capitalism brought forth by colonialism, Nyerere advocated for a return to this system. The ujamaa philosophy is especially well known for its advocation for a shared or communal ownership of property – especially land – and the localisation of production, free and compulsory education, etc. (Pratt, 1999). The aim of this movement was to offer to Africans an alternative to the widespread capitalism introduced in Africa through colonisation that allowed for a type of shared prosperity. You are expected to read up materials on Negritude, Ujamaa and Consciencism for deeper understanding of the systems.

Hermeneutical school

Hermeneutics refers to the use of various techniques of interpretation of text, an understanding of the author's intention and contextualization to make clear and meaningful, texts that are not easily understandable or derived from a specific important context (Gadamer, 1976). Now, because of the seemingly ethnophilosophical stance of African philosophy and the need to excavate philosophies and understand those excavated philosophies (since they belonged to another era – the precolonial era), the need for a hermeneutical methodology

was inevitable. Thus, the hermeneutic school can be thought of as emerging from and similar to the ethnophilosophical school. The hermeneutic school advises that the best way of doing African philosophy is by critically interpreting ancient African philosophical literature (Fayemi, 2016). Tsenay Serequeberhan goes further to state the following: "In this study, my efforts are mainly directed at doing precisely this: showing how, in progressively more concrete terms, African philosophy-even when its protagonists are not aware of it-is inherently, and cannot but be, a hermeneutic undertaking. In so doing, 1 will contribute my own interpretative elucidations of and to this discourse" (Serequeberhan, 1994). In this way, the hermeneutic School does not only tout the hermeneutic method as the proper method of doing African philosophy but also it considers African philosophy as properly hermeneutic in nature, mainly because it is excavationist, critical and contextual. Philosophers such as Tsenay Serequeberhan, Theophilus Okere, Okonda Okolo, etc., are some of the proponents of this school.

Sage School

Also known as the philosophic sagacity school. This school sought to reply accusations that African philosophy did not produce ancient philosophical characters (the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, etc., of the Western tradition). To further reiterate this point, Dismas Masolo (2016) avers that:

"The expression acquired its currency from a project conducted by the late Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka (1944–1995), whose primary aim was to establish, with evidence, that critical reflection upon themes of fundamental importance has always been the concern of a select few in African societies …" Oruka's survey of sages aimed to counter three negative claims regarding the philosophical status of indigenous African thought:

1. Unlike Greek sages who used reason, African sages do not engage in philosophic thought.

2. African sages are part of an oral tradition, whereas philosophic thought requires literacy.

3. African traditions encourage unanimity regarding beliefs and values and discourage individual critical thought" (Masolo 2016).

Thus, with the pioneering work of scholars like Marcel Griaule (1975) and Odera Oruka (1990), the sage school was born. Their method generally involved interviews with custodians of cultural knowledge – individuals who were recognised as sages by members of their communities – in a bid to not only excavate philosophical discourse but also recognise such individuals as philosophers in their own rights. These sages were shown to be in the same category as ancient traditional Greek philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, Socrates, etc. Now, whether their views can be counted as

philosophy or whether the philosophy excavated from them are not influenced by the interviewing philosopher, are all critical issues you shall be exposed to in this unit.

Professional school

The professional or universalist school is mostly noted for its strong critique of the position of the ethnophilosophical school. Members of this school usually aver that what is labelled as ethnophilosophy cannot count as true philosophy, since it mostly lacks the critical rigour usually associated with philosophy. For them, what rather counts as philosophy is:

> …the written work of a live flesh and blood person or groups of persons (or schools) which contains assertions, explanations, and justifications. It is only in such cases that there is little doubt as to what is said and who says it. It is also in such cases that we can evaluate what is said with respect to philosophic content, methodology, influence(s), or originality. (Bello, 2004: 265)

What the above, interestingly, suggests is that African philosophy (For it to be called African philosophy) would have to be produced by proper academic philosophers from Africa whose ideas, and criticisms of those ideas can be traced back and addressed to them, and not in some general appeal to a communal nomenclature such as "African", "Igbo", "Shona" etc. The problem with this sort of thinking, however, is the immediate disregard of certain views not recognised by African Academics in philosophy. Also, it is not hard to also realise that the inability to write is not a marker of intellectual or philosophical

inability – a point that cannot be ignored if we remember that Socrates had no written work. Another major criticism against this school is the inability of its members to provide new contents in African philosophy (since ethnophilosophy must be jettisoned). Some prominent members of this school include Paulin Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, and even Odera Oruka, etc. You are enjoined to read up the contributions of these scholars to the professional school.

Conversational school

The conversational school is the newest school in African philosophy that has been active from the new era or the contemporary period of African philosophy. It is developed by members of the "Conversational School of Philosophy," originally organised at the University of Calabar. This group of like-minds came together to break the dead-lock and take African philosophy to the level of system building. There are quite a number of new systems that have been floated in this era some of which includes Pantaleon Iroegbu's uwa ontology, Innocent Asouzu's ibuanyidanda philosophy or complementary reflection and Chris Ijiomah's harmonious monism. While the ideas of C.S. Momoh in his theory of mamny-many truths and those of Iroegbu and Asouzu can be said to foreground conversational thinking, the school itself draws its methodological powers from the concept of 'nmeko' or relationship thus distinguishing its approach from those of other systems. For example, conversational philosophy

is not focused on studying the nature of entities, it focuses on the nature of relationships between and among entities. All theories in contemporary African philosophy which prizes the notion of relationship including Thaddeus Metz's relational ethics, can all be treated as systems of conversational thinking.

The philosophy of Innocent Asouzu which he has termed *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy or the philosophy of complementary reflection views reality simply as serving as missing links to a complementary whole, where the relationship between missing links seeks to allow the full legitimacy and validation of other missing links. The same goes for Iroegbu's uwa ontology, Ijiomah's harmonious monism and even Metz's ethical system which prioritise the interconnection among realities. From this idea, conversational systems are those that anchor their thrust on the notion of relationship in philosophical discourse. It is important to note that conversationalism and conversational thinking does not mean mere conversation. Instead, conversational thinking involves the contestation of ideas, proponents and opponents not for the sake of synthesis but for the constant and equal improvement of opposing views (Chimakonam, 2017a; Chimakonam, 2017b). These contestations happen at the macro (intercultural) level, the Micro (local) level and the sub-micro (personal) level. The Conversational school emerged in response to the critical agitations of the professional school/deconstructionists and the need for authenticity and African foundationalism clamoured for by the excavationists. By conversing with traditional African views and institutions, constructing, deconstructing and

reconstructing them, the need to sustain traditional African views, critically evaluate views and even construct original views, are met. Some proponents of conversational systems include: C.S. Momoh, Pantaleon Iroegbu, Innocent Asouzu, Thaddeus Metz, Ada Agada, etc., to name a few. But it was Jonathan Chimakonam who systematised this approach and together with those who now identify as members of the school such as Victor Nweke, Aribiah Attoe, Mesembe Edet, Fainos Mangena, Enyimba Maduka, L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya, etc., are some of its contemporary exponents.

3.2 Methods of African Philosophy

Ethnophilosophy method

The ethnophilosophical method is mainly excavationist. For ethnophilosophers, true African philosophy is characterised by traditional African thought and research into/about such traditional views. Therefore, the ethnophilosophical method involves sifting through precolonial/ traditional African written/oral literature such as myths, folklore, proverbs, etc., to derive philosophical elements from them. One can also talk about critical ethnophilosophy, and this captures the type of ethnophilosophy that goes beyond the mere description of ancient ideas and concepts, but also allows for a critical analysis of those ideas. This is where Mangena's projects on ethnophilosophy, earlier referenced, falls within.

Philosophical sagacity

The method of philosophical sagacity was developed and propagated by scholars such as Odera Oruka and Marcel Griaule. The method generally involves identifying individuals who are thought of as repositories of communal history and knowledge, interviewing such individuals and corralling philosophical ideas from their responses to the questions being asked – usually from a philosopher. This method usually involves a lot of field activities as the interviewer must search and reach out to those they have identified as sages.

Hermeneutic method

The hermeneutic method was originally developed in Western thought by the German philosopher Hans Gadamer. Although it is mainly of Western origin, it is also a relevant method in African Philosophy. Hermeneutics seeks to interpret (philosophical) text in such a way as to make clear and meaningful the claims contained in such given text (Gadamer, 1976). It also takes into consideration the intention, context, etc., of the writer of such a text in order to understand the text and the point of view contained therein that was otherwise not explicitly stated. In so doing, the philosopher has a better understanding of literature and the context in which it is to be understood.

Conversational method

The conversational method of the conversational school focuses on discourses among philosophers and/or their ideas through a process involving *arumaristics*

(from periphery to the centre), *ohakaristics* (from centre to periphery) and ultimately *creative struggle* (unveiling of new concepts and opening of new vistas). The concept of "arumaristics" can be thought of as the main methodological idea in conversational thinking and it fully captures the method of conversational thinking by appeal to the element of relationship. The term is etymologically derived from the Igbo word *arumaru-uka or iruka,* which generally translates to "doubt" or "criticality". Chimakonam in describing this concept, employs and sees it to mean *critical conversation*. For Chimakonam, the term can be understood in two senses viz.

> (1) The Act (but not the state) of engaging in a critical exchange and (2) The mechanism for engaging in a critical exchange. While the first sense describes its doctrine of conversational philosophy, the second sense describes its methodic ambience. When corrupted, the adjective arumaristic may be derived to qualify any relationship that is characterized by a critical exchange. (Chimakonam, 2017b: 17)

What one can gather from the above is the idea that arumaristics describes both the *act* of conversing and also the *method* of conversing. In this way, one can understand the concept as both a verb (in terms of using arumaristics) and as a full description of what constitutes the tenets of arumaristics. In fully defining what arumaristics means, Chimakonam further states that "the noun arumaristics is defined as a type of critical encounter that involves the reshuffling of thesis and anti-thesis, each time at a higher level without the expectation of a synthesis." (Chimakonam, 2017a: 17)

From the above, we see that the conversational method generally involves the pitting together of two polar ideas, not for the sake of achieving a synthesis, but for the sake of improving each position through a process of contruction, deconstruction and reconstruction that involves the relationship that exists between such ideas or variables.

4.0 Conclusion

African philosophy, as is the case with other philosophical traditions, has been inundated with various schools of thoughts, each with their own unique views and methods of doing African philosophy. In possessing knowledge and an understanding of the workings of these schools and methodologies, you would have been exposed to the various methods of doing African philosophy and the schools of thoughts that are fundamental to any understanding of African philosophy.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been exposed to the various schools of thought in African philosophy. You have also been exposed to the various methodologies of African philosophy and how they function. The positions of the ethnophilosophy school, national ideological school, hermeneutic school, sage school, professional school and the conversational school, as well as methods

such as Ethnophilosophy method, Philosophical sagacity and Hermeneutic method, etc., were also examined.

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Unit 3 Some Themes in African Philosophy

Contents

1.0 Introduction
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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, we introduce you to some of the popular themes in African philosophy. We will examine themes such as Ubuntu, Personhood, Vitalism and Conversationalism, and what African philosophers have said with regard to these themes, from the early period to the contemporary era. You are expected to read up other themes such as reincarnation, destiny, complementarity, communalism, life, etc.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Possess adequate knowledge of the major themes in African philosophy.
- Possess knowledge of the major African philosophers who have addressed these themes.
- Explain the various ideas projected by different African philosophers with regards to these themes.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Some Themes in African Philosophy

Ubuntu/Afro-communitarianism

Perhaps one of the most widely acknowledged themes of African philosophy is the tendency towards a communal ontology and/or ethic. This is supremely captured in the Southern African philosophy of *Ubuntu* (a word that is etymologically translated to mean "humanity") and in similar communitarian philosophies emanating from other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Khoza, 1994; Ramose, 1999). Other examples include, *Umunna* in west Africa, *Ujamaa* in

east Africa, etc. Khoza in describing the pervasiveness of Ubuntu in African thought says the following:

> Ubuntu is a concept that is generally regarded as the foundation of sound human relations in African Societies. Its proponents claim that ubuntu or African socialism does not only form the basis of an "African World-view" but also "runs through the veins" of all Africans. In Jungian terms it would be conceptualized as the "collective unconscious" of intra-human relations – that aspect of the unconscious mind incorporating memories and experiences common to all mankind undergirding core human values, that which separates *Homo Sapiens* from other animal species.

Thus, while it is true that a communal outlook can be pointed to in other non-African societies, there is no doubt that a communal outlook bears more significance for the African – or at least, the traditional African.

Ubuntu as a philosophy simply implies humanity towards others as the basis for authentic living and/or recognition of the self only in reference to others in one's ambit. The view that a person is a person through other persons – a point also captured by Mbiti's (1990) famous dictum "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am" – implies that the existence of any one person is predicated on the existence of others. This in turn only suggests that to live well would generally consist in engaging in positive relationships with others and ensuring harmony, rather than engaging in negative relationships and ensuring discord. What Ubuntu or other such similarly communal philosophies emphasise is the dignity inherent in every individual and a need to sustain that dignity.

In other southern African communities, ubuntu is still present, albeit with a different name. For the Shona people of Zimbabwe, ubuntu is understood in terms of *Ukama*. According to Felix Murove, within this view, primacy is given "to immortality of values through the idea of kinship or relatedness. Here the main presumption is that everything that exists is relationally constituted through and with others. The Shona ethic of *Ukama puts* emphasis on the immortality of values through the solidarity of the past and the present; the immortality of values is embedded in the idea of the kinship or relatedness of all that exists" (Murove, 2007: 180). Here, we see the far-reaching tentacles of ubuntu, as it includes relations between individuals who are alive in the present, but also includes ancestors or the living-dead in its ontology. Ubuntu and other kindred themes like communalism, brotherhood, Afro-communitarianism, ujamaa and umunna emphasise mutual care, solidarity, communion, interconnectedness, interrelatedness and interdependence among those who share interest, geography, fraternity, etc., together. The idea that such solidarity is always strengthy and mutually beneficial has been challenged by Asouzu (2007) with his idea of the "super-maxim" which states "the nearer the better and the safer". Asouzu's uses this super-maxim to argue that because we are related by blood, language, territory, ethnicity, interest, etc., does not always mean that we would show and receive care and solidarity to and from those nearer to us. Sometimes, those that hurt us or our interest most come from

within. As a student of philosophy, you are expected to gauge the merit of this critique in other instances.

Vitalism

Another theme in African philosophy is the idea of vitalism. Tempels (1959), in his *Bantu Philosophy*, introduced the world to the purportedly Bantu idea of vital force – a view further expanded and analysed by the Rwandan philosopher Alexis Kagame. This force is described as some sort of ethereal energy that emanates from God and is present in every living thing. It is important to note at this juncture that whereas every reality possesses vital force, only the vital force of humans and other higher realities possess the rational element. This vital force is increased when one engages positively with others or expresses her creative power and is decreased when one engages negatively with others, becomes ill and/or is a victim of malevolent powers. Indeed, a decrease in one's vital force, if not curtailed, leads to the death of the individual. In explaining this, Tempels states,

> This supreme value is life, force, to live strongly, or vital force. The Bantu say, in respect of a number of strange practices in which we see neither rime nor reason, that their purpose is to acquire life, strength or vital force, to live strongly, that they are to make life stronger, or to assure that force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity. Used negatively, the same idea is expressed when the Bantu say: we act thus to be protected from misfortune, or from a diminution of life or of being, or in order to protect ourselves from those influences which annihilate or diminish us. (Tempels, 1959: 30-31)

There have been some criticisms against the Bantu concept of vital force. In the first instance, what is pointed to is its ethnophilosophical origins and the dangers of unanimity which it brings – what Asouzu has called the 'Tempelsian damage' (Asouzu, 2007). More substantive critiques of the view lie in Hountondji's claim that the Bantu ontology, that is the idea of vital force (as described by Alexis Kagame), is a sham. In an elaborate expression of his claims, he states the following:

> Either Bantu ontology is strictly immanent in the Bantu languages as such and contemporaneous with them (which Kagamé expressly recognizes, since he infers this ontology from the grammatical structures of Kinyarwanda), in which case it cannot have been taught by 'initiators', who would have had to express themselves in these Bantu languages; or this philosophy really was taught at a particular point in time, and in this case it is not coeval with the Bantu languages but is a historical stage in Bantu culture, destined to be overtaken by history. Either way, Bantu 'philosophy' is shown to be a myth. To destroy this myth once and for all, and to clear our conceptual ground for a genuine theoretical discourse — these are the tasks now awaiting African philosophers and scientists. I will now seek to show briefly that these tasks are in fact inseparable from political effort — namely, the [anti-imperialist] struggle in the strictest sense of the term. (Hountondji, 1996: 43-44)

Hountondji's criticisms notwithstanding, in the new era of African philosophy, philosophers like Thaddeus Metz have sought to offer a naturalist account of the vital force. In this view, where vitalism was expressed in terms of a spiritual force animating the human person, vitalism is then redefined to mean liveliness and creative power. Thus the increase of vital force would then involve the

increase of an individual's liveliness, well-being and the explicit expression of that individual's creative genius.

Personhood

The idea of personhood is also a recurrent theme in African philosophical literature. In African philosophy, there is a general acknowledgment of the fact that personhood takes on a normative and moral character and this is what distinguishes an individual from an individual *person*. As Menkiti puts it, "In this regard, ''individual'' and ''individual person'' may carry somewhat different weight" (Menkiti 2004, 325).

The idea of personhood is deeply intertwined with the communal normative nature of African thought. For most African philosophers, personhood is a function of one's positive relationship with others and with communal norms. This has led philosophers like Ifeanyi Menkiti to aver that personhood is earned and earned through actions that comply with the norms of one's community (Menkiti, 2004). It is important to note that the African conception of time – from present to past – allows for this sort of thinking. Menkiti states:

> … since … ontological progression, takes place in time, a word might also be in order regarding the nature of time in African thought. Time's movement was generally from the present to the past, so that the more of a past one has, the more standing as a person one also has. (Menkiti, 2004: 325)

So, what gives standing is not an individual's potential for the future but what that individual has accomplished in the past – and this accomplishment is normally normative. This is why a child is considered an individual and not an individual person, despite her potential for achieving personhood in future and an older individual or adult who has achieved much or who has failed to achieve much, in terms of communal normative function is considered a *person* or not a person respectively. For him, individuals are born as *individuals* and not *individual persons* – a point that is accentuated by the fact that children are rarely seen as moral agents or mourned as extravagantly as adults when they die. It is through the individual's engagement with communal rituals, and norms that the individual gains personhood and in degrees. In other words, for most Africans, it is the community that confers the label of personhood on the individual. Although some philosophers like Kwame Gyekye (1992), Bernard Matolino (2014, 2018) disagree with the degree to which this latter claim is true, there is still an acknowledgement of the fact that the community plays a role in the life of the individual.

Conversationalism

Another theme in African philosophy worth considering is conversational philosophy. It studies the nature and power of 'relationships' between variables. It makes a departure from traditional philosophy in the west which studies the nature of realities to focus attention on the relationship that exists among

realities. Conversationalism is an emerging tradition in African philosophy whose method transcends the African place and expresses itself in the global intercultural space. The conversational method 'conversational thinking' seeks to address two competing views or theses (known as *nwa-nju* and *nwa-nsa)* through the process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction in a bid to create new theses at a higher cognitive level and not with the aim of producing a synthesis.

This process is actualised through what is called *arumaristics*. "Arumaristics" simply means *critical conversation*. For Chimakonam, the term can be understood in two senses viz. "(1) The Act (but not the state) of engaging in a critical exchange and (2) The mechanism for engaging in a critical exchange…When corrupted, the adjective arumaristic may be derived to qualify any relationship that is characterized by a critical exchange (Chimakonam, 2017b: 17). It is within this framework that rival views and rival schools can hold meaningful context-laden conversations without the clouds of absolutism overshadowing such conversations. Conversationalism features prominently in the global intercultural space – indeed it is a way of *doing* intercultural philosophy – as well as the local African philosophical place.

The method was first proposed by Jonathan Chimakonam (2017a; 2017b) and is now being employed by scholars of the Conversational School of Philosophy

such as Victor Nweke, Mesembe Edet, Fainos Mangena, Maduka Enyimba, Ada Agada, Pius Mosima, Aribiah Attoe, Chukwueloka Simon, etc.

4.0 Conclusion

The corpus of African philosophy has been characterised by various philosophical themes and concerns and in this unit, you have been exposed to some of these predominant themes in African philosophy. By possessing knowledge and an understanding of some of the philosophical arguments related to these themes, you would have been exposed to the very substance of African philosophical thought.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been taught the various themes in African philosophy. You have also been exposed to the various positions of various philosophers who have engaged with these themes. Furthermore, with a working understanding of the more significant themes in African philosophy, it is taken for granted that you can now engage comfortably with some of the more pressing issues in African philosophy.

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Module 3

Unit 1 Meaning and Methodologies of Western Philosophy
Contents

1.0 Introduction

Western philosophy has been projected as the dominant philosophical tradition with its foundations traced to Greek/Hellenistic intellectual tradition. In this unit, you will be exposed to the meaning of Western philosophy and also to the discussion of its dominant methodologies.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Define Western philosophy.
- Explain and understand the historical development of Western philosophy
- Explain and understand the history, development and tenets of the predominant methodologies in Western philosophy

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Meaning of Western Philosophy

The term "Western philosophy" can be understood in two senses – a geographical sense and a characteristic sense. In the first sense, Western philosophy would encompass any and all philosophies that originate from, or develops from, the Hellenistic Greek tradition and that has spread to cover areas

that include Europe, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. In the second "characteristic" sense, Western philosophy would refer to any and all ideas that are common to, or characteristic of, (at least in a loose sense) most philosophical traditions domiciled in Europe, parts of North America and Australia. It is in this sense that one can call individualism or metaphysical dualism as "Western" philosophical ideas.

Along with the Asian and African philosophical traditions, Western philosophy is one of the major traditions in the world of philosophy. Overtime, two dominant sub-traditions have emerged in Western philosophy namely, the continental and the analytic sub-traditions. You are expected to read up sources on the nature of these two sub-traditions. From these sub-traditions, three methodologies can be identified namely, phenomenology, analysis and pragmatism. At least, the first two have sub-methods. The methods of Western philosophy are varied, and we shall take a look at some of them as described below.

But to understand the western tradition of philosophy, you have to be familiar with the logic that grounds it. It is logic that gives shape to thought and method of deriving ideas and conclusion in that thought. As the principle that guarantees intelligibility, it is logic that actually defines and differentiates broad traditions in the world of philosophy such as Western, Asian and African traditions. When methods are devised from a specific system of logic, such methods go on to shape inquiries in that tradition. The logic of Western philosophy bases on the

three laws of thought. Its classical expression is in the two-valued system of Aristotle. Different systems have since been developed especially in the modern time, but the common ties these systems share are their bases on the three laws of thought namely, identity, contradiction and excluded middle. The methodogies treated below rest on this type of logic.

3.2 Methodologies of Western Philosophy

Continental tradition

Phenomenological method

When you talk of continental philosophy, a cluster of methods are associated with it. Under this rubric, you will learn about some of these methods. The phenomenological method of philosophising was developed by Edmund Hurssel and later other critics and modifiers included but not limited to the existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Hermeneuticians like Martin Heidegger as well as elements from the Gottingen and Munich universities. The focus of this method is to study the structures of experience and consciousness. Derived from the Greek word phainomenon, which means something that appears, phenomenology seeks to philosophically study realities the way they appear devoid of any coatings or presuppositions. It means looking at reality the way it is. Advocates of this method seem to think that the best way to have a clear idea of the nature of things is to approach it

directly usually as an experience or conscious state. This method shares a lot in common with the existentialist and the hermeneutical methods. You are expected to read up literature on this two related methods. Other methods associated with the continental tradition are treated below.

Dialectic method

This method was first made famous by the Greek philosopher, Socrates (as expressed in the works of his student Plato. Dialectic usually involves two opposing views (as held by two individuals) held up to careful scrutiny by the interlocutors in a bid to clarify vague ideas and/or their consequences and consequently refute the faulty claim (usually to the point of an *ad absurdum*). With the advent of philosophers like Kant and Hegel in German idealism, Dialectics took a different meaning. Dialectics referred to dynamic relations between two views – a thesis and anti-thesis. In this version of the method, a thesis would give rise to an antithesis that is contrary to that thesis and then the tension between both contraries would then give rise to a synthesis, and so on.

Speculative method

This is perhaps the oldest known method in western philosophy. It is sometimes called the 'Arm-Chair' method because its users are looked upon as folks who used their minds to engage deeply with the nature and meaning of things while in a state of near mental trance. As the name suggests, the speculative method is thought to be founded on apriori or non-empirical approaches to gaining

knowledge. The ancient ionian philosophers like Thales of Miletus, are thought to have maximised this method in their inquiries. To this day, it is assumed that any philosopher readily and somewhat indulges in this approach for their inquiries because the line between reflection and speculation is very thin.

Methodic doubt

Methodic doubt as a method of Western Philosophy was popularized by the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1641). His use of this method eventually led to his now-famous dictum "I think, therefore I am". The method generally involves the stripping of all perceived knowledge by systematically doubting the veracity of these previously held beliefs. From this clearing away of beliefs, the philosopher is allowed to build new knowledge from scratch on a foundation that s/he is confident in. There is a hint of foundationalism in methodic doubt as philosophers search for that one truth on which to build other truths.

Analytic tradition

Analytic method

The analytic method began to take shape with the work of Bertrand Russell, his student Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gottlob Frege, G.E. Moore among others, and is one of the dominant methodological traditions in modern Western philosophy having shaped analytic philosophy as a sub-tradition. As a method, it generally stresses the importance of language and conceptual precision and generally does this through a rigorous process of conceptual clarification via the use of the tool

of formal/symbolic logic (i.e. the analysis of the logical form of an idea or proposition) and an incorporation of mathematics (and other scientific paraphernalia) in philosophising (Russell, 1945: 834). There are quite a number of methods that were either inspired by the analytic method or predated it but can be associated with it in a significant way. A few of them are discussed below.

Deductive Method

The deductive method involves a movement from a general premise to a particular conclusion. The deductive method presupposes the existence of a widely held theory, a fact that is considered as true or even a logically plausible intuition. From this general claim, particular inferences are made based on the relationship between this general claim and other claims. These inferences are usually derived via a *modus ponens, modus tollens* and/or some forms of a syllogism. This method takes for granted the absoluteness of the general claim in order to derive specific conclusions from them.

Inductive method

The inductive method is the opposite of, and alternative to, the deductive method. This method is especially used in scientific research. The inductive method involves inferring a general conclusion or hypothesis on the basis of observed instances. In other words, the premises of an inductive argument serve

as evidence that justifies a derivable conclusion. Such conclusions are not usually seen as absolute but as probable since making generalizations from some (or even many) supporting evidence does not account for all instances and thus leaves room for falsifying evidence.

There are other methods that can be associated with the analytic tradition such as the Pragmatic method. This method was developed in the United States by the likes of Charles Sanders Pierce and John Dewey and William James. It prioritises action or acting upon ideas to test their viability. It is empirical, practical and systematic. You are expected to read up literature on this approach to philosophy.

4.0 Conclusion

In Western philosophy, as is the case with other philosophical traditions, there are a good number of varying methods of doing Western philosophy split along the broad lines of continental and analytic sub-traditions. In possessing knowledge and an understanding of the workings of these methodologies, you would have been exposed to the various methods of doing Western philosophy that is fundamental to any understanding of the underlying foundation/logic of Western philosophy.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been exposed to the various methodologies of Western philosophy and how they operate. The methodologies that we have examined in this unit includes the phenomenological method, speculative method, dialectic method, methodic doubt, deductive method, inductive method and critical analysis.

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Unit 2 Some Themes in Western Philosophy

Contents

1.0 Introduction

In this unit, we will expose you to some of the popular themes in Western philosophy. We will examine themes such as dualism, existentialism empiricism and rationalism. It is expected that you read up other themes on your own as a full roaster cannot be treated here. The idea of exposing you to some themes is to give you an introduction to the orientation of western philosophy as a tradition.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Possess adequate knowledge of the major themes in Western philosophy.
- Possess knowledge of the major Western philosophers who have addressed these themes.
- Explain the various ideas projected by different Western philosophers with regards to these themes.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Some Themes in Western Philosophy

Dualism

Dualism remains a recurrent theme throughout the history of Western philosophy and in many ways defines Western ontology. Within the corpus of western philosophical literature, two sense of dualism can be pointed to. First is an external dualism and an internal dualism. External dualism generally characterises a type dualism that divides reality into two distinct types. Dualisms such as heaven vs hell, world of forms vs world of matter or imitations etc., capture this type of dualism. Plato in his *Republic* (1998), especially his allegory of the cave, captures this type of dualism aptly. In this allegory, he imagines a group of individuals, chained in a certain dark cave and only allowed to see shadows in front of them. He also imagines that one of such individuals breaks free and goes outside the cave, into the light. That individual no longer sees the shadows of the cave but now recognises the real form of things. In the world that we live in, we only encounter imitations of forms rather than the real form of things. We, for instance, see copies and instances or acts of beauty, goodness, love, etc., but never their real forms – i.e. beauty in-itself, goodness in itself or love in-itself – which is out there. It is only through a rational effort – i.e. through philosophising (which aids recollection) – that we begin to grasp at the forms themselves.

 The second type of dualism is a type of dualism that sees particular realities as possessing two distinct aspects. Dualisms such as mind-body dualism are apt here. In their description of what constitutes the nature of the person, Scholars

like Rene Descartes, Nicholas Malebranche, Gottfried Leibniz often point to the mind as an unextended and immaterial reality that is part and parcel of the human person, as opposed to the body which is extended and physical. In Descartes' words, the mind is "'that which thinks', is unextended, is not only distinct from the body but can exist without it, with the body described as an "extended and unthinking thing" (Descartes, 1641: 27). Other similar distinctions include Aristotle's substance-accidents dichotomy, John Locke's primary vs secondary quality distinction, etc., strongly capture this sense of dualism.

Existentialism

Existentialism, belonging to the Western continental tradition, is another important theme in Western philosophical thought. Existentialism as a philosophical tradition came to the fore with the philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard (considered the father of existentialism), Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, etc. The major tenet of existentialism is the idea that existence precedes essence. It is from this view that existential philosophers answer questions about the meaning of life or life's worth, identity and authentic living.

By claiming that existence precedes essence, the existential philosopher is presupposing that the human person is not born with a purpose. This invariably leads to questions about the worth of human life – leading to what is usually

referred to as existential angst. Common existential responses to this fact usually precludes the implication of the second part of the existentialist mantra – which is the fact that one must first exist and then create her purpose or essential character. This idea can be found in the works of Albert Camus (1955) and his idea of *revolt*. This rubric is extended to ideas about identity or authentic living, which would involve creating one's own identity on the foundation of a common humanity or, living an authentic life by creating one's own values and principles, and living by them (Nietzsche, 2006).

Empiricism

Empiricism stands a clear denial of the thesis that innate or *a priori* knowledge is possible. It is the idea that all knowledge comes from sense experience.

To further buttress this point, Peter Markie defines empiricism thus:

> It entails that knowledge can only be gained, *if at all*, by experience. Empiricists may assert, as some do for some subjects, that the rationalists are correct to claim that experience cannot give us knowledge. The conclusion they draw from this rationalist lesson is that we do not know at all. (Markie, 2017: NP)

In other words, if we ever claim that acquiring knowledge is possible, we must always agree that such knowledge has its origin in the senses or experience. In fact, for the empiricists, all that the rationalist critique of empiricism (i.e. doubt about the senses) seem to imply is that if knowledge cannot be known via experience, then it cannot be known at all – it is an all or nothing view. For the

most part of the modern period of Western philosophy up until even the contemporary period, this view starred as the driving theme behind most philosophical traditions such as materialism and physicalism. Prominent philosophers who held this view included the British empiricists John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume. In the 20th century, empiricism culminated in the emergence of Logical positivism as a school of thought in Western philosophy. Their emphasis on empirical verificationism only shows the deep impact of empiricism on Western philosophy.

This is not to say that empiricism is always at odds with rationalism. As Markie (2017) states, the point of conflict arises when empiricism is used in the same subject as rationalism. This conflict expresses itself when talk about the nature of the world outside the mind, is considered. As Markie points out:

> What is perhaps the most interesting form of the debate occurs when we take the relevant subject to be truths about the external world, the world beyond our own minds. A full-fledged rationalist with regard to our knowledge of the external world holds that some external world truths can and must be known *a priori*, that some of the ideas required for that knowledge are and must be innate, and that this knowledge is superior to any that experience could ever provide. The full-fledged empiricist about our knowledge of the external world replies that, when it comes to the nature of the world beyond our own minds, experience is our sole source of information. Reason might inform us of the relations among our ideas, but those ideas themselves can only be gained, and any truths about the external reality they represent can only be known, on the basis of sense experience. (2017: NP)

From the above, we discover the crux of the empiricist's argument. Despite the possibilities that a rationalist claim might make, it must be derived from sense experience. For instance, the mathematical sum "1+1=2" might be abstract in its basic form, what cannot be denied is that the idea of the above summation only emanates from our experience of real-world relationships between one object and another object. Advocates of empiricism, such as David Hume, are quick to deny the epistemic status of metaphysics. This is mainly due to the fact that what is touted as metaphysics derives its truth from non-experiential realities. Thus, for most empiricists, metaphysical knowledge is either a matter of speculation or a matter of nonsensical commentaries, neither of which points to the *true* nature of things.

Rationalism

Rationalism is another important theme in Western philosophy. It is the idea that all knowledge comes from the employment of human rational capabilities. Since human senses have their perceptual limitations, trusting empirical evidence does not necessarily guarantee a grasp of truth. The rationalist believed that only pure reason could produce truth. Perhaps the most striking expression of rationalist thought can be found in the philosophy of Rene Descartes (1641) who determined for sure, his own existence via reason alone. Rationalism can be understood by recourse to its main claims. The first claim deals with the power of human intuitions. For some rationalists, one can accord

intuitions an epistemic status – that is, consider it a veritable source of knowledge. Intuitions are defined here to mean some form of non-experiential insight. For Markie, intuitions are simply propositions "we just "see" it to be true in such a way as to form a true, warranted belief in it." (Markie 2017). We also derive intuitions from certain types of deductions. For instance, if $1 + 1 = 2$, one can intuit that since it takes two 1s to make a 2, therefore a 2 is greater than a 1. The epistemological status of intuitions varies from rationalists to rationalists. According to Markie (2017:NP):

> Some take warranted beliefs to be beyond even the slightest doubt and claim that intuition and deduction provide beliefs of this high epistemic status. Others interpret warrant more conservatively, say as belief beyond a reasonable doubt, and claim that intuition and deduction provide beliefs of that caliber. Still another dimension of rationalism depends on how its proponents understand the connection between intuition, on the one hand, and truth, on the other. Some take intuition to be infallible, claiming that whatever we intuit must be true. Others allow for the possibility of false intuited propositions.

From the above, we see the spectrum of epistemological status that rationalist usually grant intuitions.

The second, and more popular, claim made by rationalists is the idea that we have some knowledge that is innate in, or part of, our rational nature or minds. What distinguishes this claim with the intuition claim is that this particular thesis is not about deductions, but rather claims that some knowledge is in-born. Thus, not only is knowledge not derived from the senses, some knowledge is

independent of our intuitions – they only represent a part of our being. The answer to the question of the source of this innate knowledge is varied. "According to some rationalists, we gained the knowledge in an earlier existence. According to others, God provided us with it at creation. Still others say it is part of our nature through natural selection" (Markie, 2017: NP).

A third claim made by the rationalist is that there are certain *concepts* that originate from, and are part and parcel of, our rational structures. This view is similar to the innate knowledge claim briefly explained above. In this view:

> …experience does not provide the concepts or determine the information they contain.…The more a concept seems removed from experience and the mental operations we can perform on experience the more plausibly it may be claimed to be innate. Since we do not experience perfect triangles but do experience pains, our concept of the former is a more promising candidate for being innate than our concept of the latter. (Markie, 2017: NP)

This claim specifies the origin of our abstractions and concept as simply the mind and not experiences (even though our experiences can trigger our memories of these concepts). Prominent philosophers whose philosophies also portrayed a rationalist theme include Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant among others.

4.0 Conclusion

The corpus of Western philosophy has been characterised by various philosophical themes and concerns and in this unit, you have been exposed to

some of these predominant themes. By possessing knowledge and an understanding of some of the philosophical arguments related to these themes, you would have been exposed to some of the fundamental concerns of Western philosophical thought.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been taught the various themes in Western philosophy. You have also been exposed to the various positions of various philosophers who have engaged with these themes. Furthermore, with a working understanding of the more significant themes in Western philosophy, it is taken for granted that you can now engage comfortably with some of the more pressing concerns of Western philosophy.

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Unit 3 Meaning and Methodologies of Asian Philosophy
Contents

1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you will be taught the meaning of Asian philosophy (also known as Oriental philosophy or Eastern philosophy) as well as the two major methods of Asian philosophy. These methods include the aphoristic method (especially as seen in ancient Eastern philosophical literature) and the hermeneutic style which is mostly used in contemporary Asian philosophical literature.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Define Asian philosophy.
- Explain and understand the historical development of Asian philosophy
- Explain and understand the history, development and tenets of the predominant methodologies in Asian philosophy

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Meaning of Asian Philosophy

Asian philosophy, also known as Eastern philosophy and Oriental philosophy, generally characterises the philosophy tradition done from, and about, areas covering Persia, China, India and the indeed, Asian continent. Like in our understanding of Western philosophy, it characterises those ideas that are salient in, and common to, indigenous peoples of Persia, India and Asia, generally speaking. Within the corpus of Asian philosophy, two major methods are immediately apparent viz. the Hermeneutic method and the Aphoristic method.

The logic that undergirds Asian philosophy can be teased out of forms of thinking like the Chinese Yin and Yang. That is, a system of logic that accommodates truth-glut. Truth-gluts are the intermediate values typically in many-valued logics especially the three-valued systems. In this type of reasoning, two seemingly opposed variables can co-exist in a middle value. Systems like this often do not endorse the laws of contradiction and excluded-middle. There are old and emerging systems of logic in India and China, but it is not yet the case that they have formulated alternative laws to contraction and excluded middle. What is clear, however, is that inferences in the Asian philosophy tradition are supported by logics that tolerate and accommodate reasonings that endorse the possibility of the middle value.

Similarly, the mothods employed in this tradition, are supported by such a logic. Talk of many valued logic as the logical basis for Asian philosophy should not be construed to mean that the laws of thought do not apply at all in it. They do, but their scope is limited. When you toss an object up, it will fall

down in Beijing as it would in Athens, this is two-valued logic in play. But there are other contexts in which it does not fully apply. For example, In Chinese culture, an honourable act does not consist in exposing the crime/shame of a family member, it consists in hiding it. Yet, in the same Chinese culture, civic responsibility requires one to expose criminals for punishment. Inferences of the type that requires one to shield the shame of a family member does not amount to contradiction of the dictate of the law, because, family consists an exception. So, Asian philosophy generally, whether in Budhhism, Confucianism or Taoism, etc., maintain that virtue lies in the middle. Temperance is the goal of all desirable actions. Unlike in the West, were extremes define the measure of good and wrong, it is the mifddle course that symbolise perfection in Asian philosophy tradition.

3.2 Methodologies of Asian Philosophy

Hermeneutic Method

The hermeneutic method was originally developed in Western thought by the German philosopher Hans Gadamer (1976). Although its origin is decidedly western, its influence as a method has spread through other philosophical traditions including African philosophy, and in this case, Asian philosophy. Hermeneutics as a method seeks to interpret (philosophical) text in such a way as to make clear and meaningful the claims contained in said given text (Gadamer 1976). Furthermore, it takes into consideration the intention, context,

etc., of the writer of such a text in order to understand the text and the point of view contained therein that was otherwise not explicitly stated.

You should however note that before Hermeneutics was formulated in the West, the Chinese have been employing it for centuries in interpreting ancient texts like the analects of Confucius, etc., although without calling it the name hermeneutics. There is a sense in which one can say that the Chinese did not borrow the method, because they have been using it. There are many texts composed in later dynasties which were simply various interpretations of the ancient texts. What must be explained though is that the structure of hermeneutics as formulated in the West varies significantly from the structure of the one deployed in ancient China.

Aphoristic Method

While the hermeneutic method is often used by contemporary Asian philosophers to describe ancient philosophical texts of their ancestors, the aphoristic style was used by those ancient Asian philosophers which they study. The aphoristic method involves the use of short, terse, memorable and quotable verses (similar to proverbs in African philosophy) to convey some philosophical thought or truth. These terse responses are usually answers to a previously asked question. One would think that this implies that the aphoristic method is some form of Socratic dialectic, but this is hardly the case because whereas the latter involves some discussion, the former does not. It is precisely this unique way of

doing philosophy that calls for the use of hermeneutics (described above) in much of contemporary Asian philosophy. A good expression of the Aphoristic style is Lao Tzu's masterpiece, *Tao Te Ching* and *Analects* by the Chinese philosopher Confucius.

It is important that you know that in modern time, following the influence of western civilisation, there are many Asian philosophers today who are researching and publishing in known western methods such as analysis. This has become a serious issue in comparative discourse because, besides being an alien method, there is a question as to whether analysis suits the Asian tradition well, and the worry that the use of analytic method in Asian philosophy might lead to crisis of thought in the Asian tradition of philosophy.

4.0 Conclusion

In Asian/Eastern philosophy, as is the case with other philosophical traditions, there are a good number of varying methods of doing Asian philosophy. In possessing the knowledge and an understanding of the workings of these methodologies, you would have been exposed to the various methods of doing Asian philosophy that are fundamental to any understanding of its underlying logic.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been exposed to the meaning of Asian philosophy as a tradition. You have also been exposed to some methodologies of Asian philosophy and how they operate. The methodologies that we have examined in this unit include the Aphoristic method and the hermeneutic method.

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Unit 4 Some Themes in Asian Philosophy

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1.0 Introduction

While the corpus of Asian philosophy is quite broad, certain themes are prominent in most of the literatures in Asian philosophy. In this unit, you will be exposed to the themes from the Indian philosophical tradition to the Chinese philosophical traditions, with special reference to themes like, Monism, Harmony, Reincarnation/life cycles and the idea of Karma and then discuss what Asian philosophers have said with regards to these theme, from the early period to the contemporary era.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Possess adequate knowledge of the major themes in Western philosophy.
- Possess knowledge of the major Western philosophers who have addressed these themes.
- Explain the various ideas projected by different Western philosophers with regards to these themes.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Some Themes in Asian Philosophy

Monism

In Asian philosophy, especially Chinese philosophy, there is an underlying

metaphysical understanding of the universe that is monistic in its outlook. This

monism derives from the view that all of reality emanates from a single source.

According to Franklin Perkins (Perkins, 2019):

> All Chinese thinkers who discussed ultimate origins took that
> origin to be unique. The best known name for this source is *dao* 道,
> which means path, way, or guide. Another important name
> is *taiji* 太極, the "supreme polarity."[5] The term *taiji* appears in
> the *Yi Jing* as the original unity from which *yin* and *yang* emerge. It
> remained an important term, particularly during the Confucian
> revival in the Song dynasty. Positing a single source had a decisive
> influence on Chinese thought, as it implies an underlying unity and
> connection that easily threatens differentiation and division. (2019)

By locating the origin of all things in taiji, the Chinese metaphysician allows us

to recognise the underlying sameness of all things – at least in origin. This

underlying sameness allows for the importance placed on ideas about

maintaining harmony, connectedness and unity. For the Chinese metaphysician,

the nature of the original stuff is indeterminate – that is it lacks an identifier –

and is, therefore, not a thing, since things possess identifiers that differentiates

them. So, within the view nothingness is not an absence of being, but an absence of identifiable or differentiated beings.

Harmony

The idea of harmony is a recurrent theme in Asian philosophy, and it is expressed in major philosophical movements such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Confucianism was developed by the great Chinese philosopher, *Kung Fu Tzu* (Latinized as "Confucius") and is today a major part of Asian philosophy and is being studied in various universities within and outside China. Within Confucianism, the idea of harmony is contained in the concept of *Jen* (Edet, 2006). For Confucians, the problems of the society can be characterized as stemming from the lack of harmony and presence of discord in society. This discord is, in turn, a derivative of the human capacity towards wickedness.

 Jen represents the cultivation of the implicit capacity of harmony and cohesion that is also part of the human person. This cultivation is achieved through service to others (Edet 2006). That is, by promulgating the right social attitudes towards others in one's social sphere, harmony is achieved.

In another view, harmony must involve differences. Since the monism in Chinese philosophy is a source-based monism – that is, it is based on the view that all of reality emanates from a single source – the harmonization which

precludes it must involve a coming together of differentiated beings. As Li states:

> For Shi Bo, a harmonious world must be a diverse world. This is so because a healthy and prosperous world relies on its diverse things to go together. This is why the ancient sage-kings sought diversity. As in good cooking and in good music making, a healthy family must consist of spouses from different tribes, a prosperous nation must seek wealth from various sources, and a good government must have ministers capable of holding different opinions. Harmony out of diversity produces a lively world; sameness without adequate difference can only lead to a dead end. (Li, 2006: 585)

In other words, harmony is best achieved when the objects of harmony are diverse. This is even more profound when we realise that harmony or unity cannot exist when only one reality exists. There must be more than one type of reality for harmony to occur. The discourse on the theme of harmony can be extended to the theme of temperance, balance or golden mean where concepts such as Zhong, dao, etc., are used to represent the middle path or the way of the mean or the idea of balance. Virtue for many Asian philosophical systems lie in the middle and not in the extremes. As a matter of interpretation, it is believed by ancient Chinese philosophers that the extremes are unified in the middle thus forming a harmony of opposites.

Reincarnation/life cycles

Another theme in Asian philosophy is the idea of reincarnation and recurrent lifestyle. This theme is quite prominent in Hindu philosophy. The idea of reincarnation presupposes that an individual, once dead, can be reborn in yet another body to live another lifetime. Reincarnation is based on a similar metaphysics in the African tradition. The idea is this. Every individual is made up of some life force that is eternal and independent of the body. When an individual dies, his body decays but that life force remains. It is this life force that penetrates a new body and is, thus, reborn – and with the same personality as the previously dead individual. For the Hindu, this body can be a human body or that of an animal. As Edet states, "they hold the view that we can be reborn in the form of a lower animal, a snake or a worm for instance, or even as a plant" (Edet, 2006: 18). In Hindu thought, the idea of reincarnation is a burdensome one – since one can be reborn countless times – and indeed what is considered the aim of an individual's life is to properly break this cycle of reincarnation. The breaking of the cycle – or *Moksha*, as the Hindus call it – involves a reunion with the ultimate being, Brahman. It is this fact that transport the fact of an individual's death to a higher pedestal of importance and significance.

Karma

Closely related to the reincarnation view is the theme of Karma. Another theme in Asian philosophy, this view is domiciled in Hindu thought. Karma, as

Herman states, adjudges that while suffering is present in the world, the intensity of one's suffering is fully captured by an understanding of the level of harm the individual must have perpetrated in a former life (Herman 1976, 131). While one's current status, whether opulence or suffering, is a direct consequence of the past life, living a good life despite one's predicament would be a good way of securing one's wellbeing in the subsequent iteration of the individual's life.

This view is also prevalent in Buddhist philosophy. In describing what Buddha says about karma, Mark Siderits states:

> What the Buddha teaches is instead the far stricter view that each action has its own specific consequence for the agent, the hedonic nature of which is determined in accordance with causal laws and in such a way as to require rebirth as long as action continues. (Siderits, 2019: NP)

What is being pointed to here is the fact that the idea of Karma, as propounded by the Buddha, is a consequentialist view, which agrees that all actions must present to the perpetrator, their consequences – which comes in varying degrees of pleasure and pain. The Buddha goes on to at least accept a curious view on the idea of karma. According to Siderits:

> This is the view that the Buddha appears to have accepted in its most straightforward form. Actions are said to be of three types: bodily, verbal and mental. The Buddha insists, however, that by action is meant not the movement or change involved, but rather the volition or intention that brought about the change. (Siderits, 2019: NP)

This is an interesting view that points to something quite profound. For the Buddha, the mere act itself does not induce karma. A child that unknowingly metes out an insult at an older person, would not corral the type of (bad) karma associated with the act – mainly because the child is an amoral being. However, a full moral agent that spews the same insult, would corral (bad) karma, since such an act is given weight by the *intentions* behind it. Thus, in Buddhist philosophy, intention plays a huge role in defining whether one's actions would elicit some form of karma or not.

4.0 Conclusion

Asian philosophy has been characterised by various philosophical themes and concerns and in this unit, you have been exposed to some of these predominant themes. These themes include the ideas of monism, harmony, reincarnation/life cycles and karma. By possessing knowledge and an understanding of some of the philosophical arguments related to these themes, you would have been exposed to some of the fundamental themes of Asian philosophical thought.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been taught some of the predominant themes in Asian philosophy. You have also been exposed to the positions of various philosophers who have engaged with these themes. Furthermore, with a

working understanding of the more significant themes in Asian philosophy, it is taken for granted that you can now engage comfortably with some of the more pressing concerns of Asian philosophy.

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Module 4

Unit 1 A Comparison of African and Western Philosophies

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, as will be the case in all the other units in this module, we shall be doing comparative philosophy in practical terms. Here, specifically, you shall be exposed to a comparative analysis between African Philosophy and Western philosophy.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Learn how to compare African philosophy with Western philosophy.
- Compare African philosophical thought and Western philosophical thought.
- Understand the points of similarity between Western philosophical tradition and African philosophical tradition.
- Understand points of similarity between the Western and African philosophical traditions

3.0 Main Content

3.1 A Comparison of Western and African Philosophy

Despite the problems associated with comparative philosophy, it is nonetheless a worthy pursuit – especially for those who are interested in exploring, understanding and integrating other philosophical traditions in their understanding of philosophy. But Kwasi Wiredu (1976) cautioned against bad comparative studies such as the one conducted by Robin Horton (1967). Wiredu showed that the comparison of Western science with African thought which Horton did was a misnomer. It was supposed to be Western thought and African thought, or western science and African science. It is imperative to compare the same intellectual genre across different traditions in order to arrive at a credible result. This, however, was not what Horton did which was why its outcome was criticised. In the African intellectual space, comparative philosophy (and

intercultural philosophy) has played a dominant role in the development of African philosophy.

Indeed, one can argue that systematic African philosophy arose as a result of a comparative exercise or as a reactionary to Western racist philosophy. This is evident in the isolation of the decidedly racist accusations of pre-logicality (or downright irrationality) levied on Africans and the subsequent replies that have continued to shape African philosophy today. What is clear and important here is the reaching out to a different tradition, the crystallization of the philosopher's view on that tradition and the exploration of similar or contrary themes within the philosopher's own tradition.

Beyond this, comparative exercise between African and Western philosophy has taken up a more specific undertone. Specific concepts and ideas in Western and African Philosophies are the variables being compared. Examples of such comparisons abound. First, one can draw comparisons between Afro-communitarian ethics/ontology that is thought of as characteristically African and individualism, that is thought of as characteristically Western. This instance is an example of a contrast between two dissimilar ideas that are diametrically opposed in both traditions. On the one hand, we encounter the African view that generally speaking, subsumes the authenticity of the individual under the communal umbrella – drawing the conclusion that the individual gets her

legitimacy from the community. This view is aptly captured by John Mbiti who avers:

> In both levirate and sororate institutions of marriage we see further at work the philosophical awareness of the individual that 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'. The existence of the individual is the existence of the corporate; and where the individual may physically die, this does not relinquish his social-legal existence since the 'we' continues to exist for the 'I.' (Mbiti, 1990: 141)

It must be noted that this communion is not only a feature for those who are alive, and in this world, but also applies to and incorporates the living-dead.

On the other hand, we encounter Western individualism which generally avers that the individual is an autonomous being capable of creating its own authenticity without reference to the community and that the individual legitimises the community since it is the individual who relinquishes her powers for the sake of the community. Somogy Varga shows this clearly when he states that:

> [autonomy] describes a person who acts in accordance with desires, motives, ideals or beliefs that are not only hers (as opposed to someone else's), but that also express who she really is…The idea of autonomy emphasizes the individual's self-governing abilities, the independence of one's deliberation from manipulation and the capacity to decide for oneself. It is connected to the view that moral principles and the legitimacy of political authority should be grounded in the self-governing individual who is free from diverse cultural and social pressures. According to the ethic of autonomy, each individual should follow those norms he or

she can will on the basis of rational reflective endorsement. (Varga, & Guignon, 2017: NP)

Thus, we notice an interesting difference with the Western view as contrasted with the African view. Here, the community, and/or the power it wields, is looked upon as a hindrance rather than an enhancer of the individual. Hence, in the Western view, the disconnect from communal power is always necessary for authentic living and furthermore, the development of values and principles, must emanate from the individual and no one else.

One can also compare African metaphysics with Western metaphysics. On the one hand, African metaphysics involves a complementary harmony between and among realities – missing links as Asouzu (2004; 2007; 2013) calls them. This sort of metaphysics has been expressed in different theories such as Complementarity, harmonious monism (Ijiomah, 2014), Njikoka (Ozumba & Chimakonam, 2014), Ezumezu (Chimakonam, 2019), etc. This metaphysics stems from the overall communal or relational outlook of African thought and this allows the African metaphysician to see reality as inextricably interlinked with each other.

This is contrasted with the Western view which favours a dichotomised view of reality where realities are either made up two types of properties – for instance, accidental properties and essential properties, mind and body, etc. – or are of two kinds – forms and their copies. The first view is famously propagated by the

Greek philosopher, Aristotle. He described reality as composed of substance or essences – which are the underlying property of a thing, which makes it what it is and on which all other properties inhere – and accidents which are properties that a thing possesses but which are not essential to it – properties that a thing can do without. The second distinguishes the material world from the immaterial world. Where the former consists of physical objects (sometimes considered as imitations or copies) and the latter consists of spiritual entities or the real forms of things.

Underlying these differences whether in epistemology, metaphysics or ethics is logic. The logic of African and Western traditions differ not in substance but in degree. Whereas the two-valued logic which is compartible with the three laws of thought irrespective of system or variant shapes philosophising in Western tradition, a three-valued variant which is truth-glut compliant appears to undergird philosophising in African tradition. The difference is not that one system applied in one tradition and does not apply in the other but that each of the two traditions has a dominant logic structure. To explain clearly, the law of contradiction stipulates that A cannot be A and not A at the same time. And the law of excluded middle states that A is either A or not A. This is called truth value-gap. The two-valued logic of which there are different systems, holds an inference or an argument to be invalid if any of these laws is violated. This is however not the case in African tradition where there is room for the middle position or the intermediate value. This does not mean that the three laws of

thought do not apply in African tradition, they do but with considerable limitation. This is because there is room for A and not A to hold at the same time, all things being equal. This is called truth valued-glut and appeals to the significance of context in the analysis of argument. For example, if one person says that it is raining in Abuja and another says that it is not raining in Abuja, according to the law of contradiction, or even that of excluded middle, both cannot hold. But if we allow for some contextual analysis, we might discover that it is raining in one part of Abuja and not in other parts. As such, depending on the perspective of the subject, one can ither say that it is raining in Abuja or not raining in Abuja, at the same time. In otherwords, both statements could hold, depending on the context and/r perspective, and this fact immediately suspends the laws of contradiction and excluded middle. Chimakonam (2019) has formulated a prototype logic called Ezumezu that explains inferences of this type. Now, when you consider this logical discrepance in light of epistemology, ethics or metaphysics, then you would have reached the foundation of the nature and structure of the philosophical traditions in both Africa and the West.

4.0 Conclusion

In doing comparative philosophy, it is important that the scholar possesses a working knowledge of the traditions being contrasted, and also that the proper types of ideas are compared. With regards to a comparative analysis between

African philosophy and western philosophy, we have found and discussed some of the subtle (mostly) dissimilarities between these two philosophical traditions.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been exposed to a comparative analysis between African philosophy and Western philosophy. We have found that a recurrent theme when comparing both traditions is the overall relational outlook in African philosophy as contrasted with the mostly individualistic outlook of western philosophy. At the end of this unit, you would have been able to put forward your own views regarding the comparative differences and similarities between African philosophy and Western philosophy.

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Unit 2 A Comparison of African and Asian Philosophies

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you will be exposed to a comparative analysis between African philosophy and Asian philosophy. You will encounter and examine the various themes in both Asian and African philosophical traditions that bear some similarities as well as some of the points of divergence.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Learn how to compare African philosophy with Asian philosophy.
- Compare African philosophical thought and Asian philosophical thought.
- Understand the points of similarity between Asian and African philosophical traditions.
- Understand points of dissimilarity between the Asian and African philosophical traditions.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 A Comparison of Asian and African Philosophies

When comparing African and Asian philosophies, there is no doubt that certain similarities abound. In the first instance, we encounter similarities between African communalism and the Asian theory of harmony. Thaddeus Metz and Daniel Bell (2011: 80) inform us that there are similarities between Ubuntu or African communalism and Asian (in this case, Chinese) ethics. They agree on "the central value of community, the desirability of ethical partiality, and the idea that we tend to become morally better as we grow older".

In both traditions, there is the deep-rooted belief that human flourishing is mostly possible within the framework of harmonious interpersonal relationships

between individuals. In the African view, individuals become *individual persons* only if they express their communal normative function by engaging with communal rites and rituals, engaging positively with others in their community, showing solidarity and contributing to the overall development of the society. It is by doing so that the individual earns her personhood. This is similar to the Asian view (like in Confucianism) where the progress and order in the society are characterised by the harmonious living in and amongst members of the society (Edet, 2006). While one can draw parallels in this manner, dissimilarities within these two views can also be pointed. In Asian thought, whereas harmony first begins with personal development and the development of the proper temperance, the African view avers that individual personhood is a function of one's engagement with the community. Thus, whereas personal development is intrinsic in the Asian view, the attainment of personhood is extrinsic in the African view. Metz and Bell further claim that whereas the community is the sole source of ethics in much of the African view, the Asian view considers other sources of ethics that are not tied to the community. They state:

> To (over)simplify, interpreters of *Ubuntu* often write as though one community is the main source of obligation, whereas Confucians have long argued about the different kinds of communal attachments we have and how they might come into conflict…. In the case of Confucianism, the key texts explicitly discuss the different kinds of social relations that ought to form our circle of commitments. "The Great Learning," canonized by the Song Dynasty scholar Zhu Xi (1130–1200) as one of the four Confucian classics, opens

with a passage about the need to regulate the family, the state, and the whole world. And many of the debates within Confucianism have been over how to interpret passages in the *Analects* and the works of Mencius that suggest ties to parents should have priority over ties to society in cases of conflict. (Metz and Bell, 2011: 83)

Indeed, Mencius' claim which suggests the priority of the family over the society would be at odds with most African views – even including Nyerere's Ujamaa (familyhood) philosophy. There is, within the African view, that constant recourse to the common good of the community in which one belongs. Even the respect of elders or one's parent is invariably tied to how they have sort to become *persons* – earlier stated to be based on one's relationship with one's community.

In the second instance, one can also draw up parallels between Indian philosophical views about the status of nature and the African view. In Hindu philosophy, there is the seemingly pantheistic view that nature is only an aspect of a larger God-being referred to as *Brahman* (Edet, 2006). This view can be contrasted with the African vital force theory. Although the latter is not strictly pantheistic in its rendering, one can draw similarities between the two. The vital force theory accepts that in every aspect of reality lies a seemingly ethereal force that animates said realities and in varying degrees. This vital force is thought of as a piece of, emanating from, a supreme being. Thus, whereas the Hindu philosophical view agrees that reality is identical to Brahman, the

African view avers that there is some part of the supreme being that is present in all realities.

Another instance where some comparison can be drawn between the African view and the Asian view lies in the ideas of reincarnation and lifecycles. For most philosophers in the Asian (Hindu), there is a strong presence of the idea of reincarnation. This idea is in turn linked to the idea of karma, which is the view that the actions of an individual in a present life determine that individual's status in a later iteration of her life. reincarnation, here, is considered a burdensome experience with the breaking of this life cycle a recurrent desire of any individual. In the African space, the idea of reincarnation is also visible, whether this reincarnation is thought of in terms of children who are constantly reborn after their relatively short lives or whether it is thought of in terms of individuals being reborn in later progenies. One dissimilarity, though, is that in much of the literature on the African view, proper reincarnation (excluding those of the children – who are thought of as evil – alluded to earlier), there is nothing that suggests that reincarnation is burdensome, as in the Asian-Hindu view, or that breaking the cycle of reincarnation is what is most desired.

One can also find substantial similarities between African and Asian metaphysical views about the distinction between being and non-being. In African philosophy, this distinction is not part of the narrative. While being

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encapsulates all that exists, non-being is an expression that makes no sense to the African. Rather what is seen as the opposite of being, is being-alone. In this way, the questions and problems associated with the talk of nothingness are easily circumvented. You are expected to read up Asouzu (2007) for more details.

In Asian philosophy, the understanding is different. Being is differentiated from non-being but in a unique way. Perkins states that:

> The terms *you* 有 and *wu* 無 are among the most important metaphysical terms in the Chinese tradition (see Liu Jing 2017; Chai 2014b; Wang Bo 2011; Cheng 2009; Bai 2008; and the essays in Liu and Berger 2014). They are often translated as "being" and "non-being", but *wu* refers not to radical nothingness but to the lack of differentiated beings. Thus in the context of the *Laozi*, Hans-Georg Moeller (2007) translates the two terms as "presence" and "non-presence", Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (2003) translate them as "determinate" and "indeterminate", and Brook Ziporyn (2014) as "being-there" and "not-being-there" (Perkins, 2019: NP).

Thus, in Asian metaphysics, non-being is simply understood as the non-differentiated single reality from which differentiated realities spring from. So non-being is not understood as an absence of reality but the absence of differentiated being. Hence, in comparison with the African view, there is a tacit denial of the possibility of nothingness. However, this is where the similarities become murky – as being-alone and non-differentiated being are two different understanding of non-being. Whereas the latter implies a non-identifiable being, the former implies non-relationality.

4.0 Conclusion

In comparing both African and Asian philosophy, you encounter certain similarities in their respective viewpoints albeit with subtle differences in their detail. While most themes like ideas about reincarnation, harmony and panpsychism, and even a truth-glut background logic are present in both traditions, their understanding of these philosophical issues are different. Engaging properly with both traditions would be intellectually worthwhile and worth doing.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have studied a comparative analysis between African philosophy and Asian philosophy. You have found that although both traditions bear some similarities, there are some subtle differences in the way these similar themes are understood in both traditions. At the end of this unit, you would have been able to put forward your own views regarding the comparative differences and similarities between Asian philosophy and African philosophy.

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Unit 3 A Comparison of Asian and Western Philosophies
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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you will be exposed to a comparative analysis of Asian philosophy and Western philosophy. You shall examine the various themes in both Asian and Western philosophical traditions that bear some similarities as well as some of the points of divergence.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Learn how to compare Western philosophy with Asian philosophy.
- Compare Western philosophical thought and Asian philosophical thought.
- Understand the points of similarity between Asian and Western philosophical traditions.
- Understand points of dissimilarity between Asian and Western philosophical traditions.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 A Comparison of Asian and Western Philosophies

In comparing Asian philosophy with Western philosophy, you encounter certain similarities and differences that are hard to ignore and interesting to delineate. In terms of similarities, you can think of Asian and Western philosophies as person and individual-focused philosophies, respectively. What this means is that there is a focus on the human individual as a person and as an individual respectively. In Asian philosophy, the focus on the person is manifested in the need for the self-development of the individual involved. As such, there is a

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focus on developing certain virtues that are meant to improve an individual's relationship with the world outside him.

For Western philosophy, there is a similar recourse to individual development, but this is where such similarities end. Whereas the focus on the individual is present, the reasons for this focus is different. Whereas the focus in Asian philosophy involves seeking some form of harmony outside the individual, the focus in Western philosophy is the flourishing of the individual herself in the community of other individuals. Thus, the type of personal development spoken of here involves developing the requisite rational capacities and the right ethical framework to ensure that the individual flourishes and does so in such a way that does not prevent that individual from truncating the flourishing of another individual.

Another key similarity would be the contentment with those things that cannot be changed and the pursuit of a *middle way*. In Buddhist philosophy, this middle way involves the rejection of an ascetic lifestyle – an extreme way of curbing or mastering one's desires for the things contained in the world and avoiding the corruption that comes with an overindulgence in worldly pleasures – and the rejection of a pleasure laden life – which is an extreme way avoiding the dishonour of worldly suffering. What is touted, is a mode of living contently while at the same time avoiding the corruption of opulence and the dishonour of

suffering. Other virtues such as honour, seeking justice, serving the common good etc., are touted as virtues that the individual must possess in other to live a good life. Indeed, the repercussions of living a life without virtue would involve a lack of enlightenment, a poor reiteration of one's life due to bad karma and/or a lack of harmony in the society. In Western philosophy, especially ancient Greek philosophy, a similar view was famously touted by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (2000) with his theory of the Golden mean, which similarly advocates for the avoidance of extremes.

Beyond this, one also observes the differences in the metaphysical outlook of both philosophical traditions. In Eastern thought, the general feeling is that the world operates in a harmonious holistic framework. In Hindu philosophy, this is seen in the belief that the universe and the objects in the universe are simply extensions, and parts of, of a single being – Brahman. In Chinese philosophy, this is seen in the idea of social and environmental harmony, which is seen as the mode of achieving a good life (Edet, 2006). In western philosophy, this harmonistic outlook is not prominent. Instead, reality is studied and understood in specific and fragmented terms.

One can also compare and contrast between Western and Asian metaphysical views about the distinction between being and non-being. In Western philosophy, this distinction is quite sharp. While being encapsulates all that

exists, non-being is an expression of non-existence or nothingness. Non-being is seen here as a negation of being – an expression of emptiness that makes logical sense if one can imagine a ticking off of all that exists. The question of nothingness raises some serious philosophical problems like: why is there something instead of nothing? Is there any support, whether *a priori* or *a posteriori* for the claim "there is nothing"?

In Asian philosophy, the understanding is different. Being is differentiated from non-being but in a unique way. Perkins states that:

> The terms *you* 有 and *wu* 無 are among the most important metaphysical terms in the Chinese tradition (see Liu Jing 2017; Chai 2014b; Wang Bo 2011; Cheng 2009; Bai 2008; and the essays in Liu and Berger 2014). They are often translated as "being" and "non-being", but *wu* refers not to radical nothingness but to the lack of differentiated beings. Thus in the context of the *Laozi*, Hans-Georg Moeller (2007) translates the two terms as "presence" and "non-presence", Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (2003) translate them as "determinate" and "indeterminate", and Brook Ziporyn (2014) as "being-there" and "not-being-there" (Perkins, 2019: NP).

So, in Asian metaphysics, non-being is simply understood as the non-differentiated single reality from which differentiated realities spring from. So non-being is not understood as an absence of reality but as an absence of differentiated being.

4.0 Conclusion

In comparing both the Western philosophical tradition and the Asian philosophical tradition, you discovered some similarities – especially with regards to the ethical idea that living a good life would involve some form of balance, without an over-indulgence in an extreme. This also points to a logical difference between the two traditions. You have also discovered other contrasting views as explained above.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, you have been exposed to the examination and a comparative analysis of Western philosophy and Asian philosophy. You have found that although both traditions bear some similarities, there are some specific differences. At the end of this unit, you would have been able to put forward your own views regarding the comparative differences and similarities between Asian philosophy and Western philosophy.

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