PHILOSOPHY AND RELEVANCE WITHIN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

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With the world economic recession of the second half of this century, planners of education are beginning to reassess areas of priority. In both developed and developing nations, the common measure of what stands at the apex and what stays at the base has become **relevance**, relevance, in terms of comparative utility. There is one important difference though: developed nations may, with some comfort, reorder their priorities, retaining all there was in their educational systems — they can afford a few luxuries alongside their chosen essentials. The predicament of most developing nations is that of moving beyond the level of survival which is basically defined by the absence of luxury. In such a situation, priorities are reordered among essentials, with no room for luxuries.

In this paper, I want to discuss the dilemma of the professional philosopher in modern Africa. I should want to argue that by historical accident the African philosopher is inevitably caught in a profession he finds difficult to grapple with. He may, with great difficulties, succeed as a philosopher but when successful, I wish to argue, the African philosopher becomes irrelevant to his society. And since he cannot defy the increasing creed of relevance upon which the very existence of his profession depends, the African philosopher is not sure of what direction to follow. I finally propose a reorientation in African philosophy which, in a remarkable sense, meets the demands of professional philosophizing and yet is of relevance to modern African society.

One now begins to doubt the impact of the persuasive Marxian view that the business of philosophy should be directed towards changing the world rather than merely explaining it. However, there are still many thinkers who agree fully with Marx that philosophy has a role to play in society or, at least, that there is some connection, no matter how loose, between philosophy and the problems of society. To underscore the relevance of their enterprise a few philosophers are prepared to come down from the clouds to do more than preoccupy themselves with the mere

satisfaction of their intellectual curiosity. These philosophers, who believe that their enterprise is not merely that of satisfying their profession but also the society in which they live, pay dearly for taking this "deviant" route. Thus the greatest danger any philosopher of this orientation faces is that of not being accorded the status of a "genuine" philosopher. And if he insists on belonging to the community of philosophers he must, with humility, accept a peripheral position, or otherwise quit the scene.

Reactions to this dilemma are more devastating among professional philosophers in developing nations. The professional philosopher in Africa, for instance, is aware that the only way of staying in his profession is by showing evidence of its relevance to society. He is also aware that the same path leads him out of the intellectual community to which he so much wishes to belong. Rather than choose one way or the other, the first use most African philosophers make of their acquired skills is to search for a device that enables them to eat their cake and have it. There is a great deal of evidence for this. If we relate themes in conference proceedings to those of formal classroom philosophical teaching, they stand poles apart. In other words, the preoccupation of most African philosophers in their various institutions of higher learning is different both in content and in presentation from that which they bring to the market place — conferences, symposia public seminars, etc. Thus professional African philosophers present a double-faced appearance, one in fulfilment of their professional call and the other perhaps adapted to social and material pay-offs.

There is an immediate temptation to read fraud or dishonesty into this charge even before getting its details; that, of course, could make it a moral issue which by definition, presupposes the possibility of choice and therefore the presumption that the African philosopher could have done otherwise. Yet, it is not a clear case of conscious fraud. It is due to obvious difficulties. See the predicament of the African philosopher: he is employed by an institution entirely financed by a government, a government sponsored by a people and a people whose creed of relevance for any discipline has increasingly become one of quantifiable utility. But philosophy being in Cicero's words "the art of life" whose practitioners are men of prudence with acquired skills for

manoeuvre, African philosophers are not easy to trap. Only the fool would choose not to utilize his acquired skill to his own advantage. And the African philosopher is by no means one.

The greatest difficulty that faces the philosopher, apart from that of defining the very discipline he practises, is the task of showing the relevance of his profession. It is a common problem that faces virtually all the literary disciplines. This generalization does not itself serve as a satisfactory defence. The philosopher is still left to put forward his own defence. Efforts have been made severally by professional philosophers in Africa at intervals, that is, during conferences to demonstrate the relevance of philosophy to society. To say such efforts have been unsuccessful is to beg one of the points I wish to establish in this discussion. The point is that in between conference periods, the same philosophers take to a brand of philosophy that is almost totally detached from the problems of society. Ironically, some even make efforts to justify this move back into the clouds. It is not therefore a case of a group of people doing one thing and saying another but that of moving towards two irreconcilable directions and seeking to justify both.

Admittedly, there is no one subject matter to which all philosophers' hands are tied. Every approach, or indeed, every tradition of philosophy has its own merits and perhaps also its own relevance. That alone puts the matter on a place that makes complete nonsense of the question "which tradition is more relevant?" This may sound obscurantist, but it does point to an intrinsic characteristic of philosophical discourse, and indeed a rewarding one for the professional. For, if, as it suggests, the question of relevance remains a purely subjective matter then one man's opinion is as good as another's. But in the layman's thinking what is relevant and what is not are matters not of theory but of empirical assessment. And he, unlike the philosopher, would think that it is an issue that can be settled. The philosopher may intractably stick to his position but he is nevertheless constrained to take seriously the layman's view. To do otherwise is to ignore the same creed of relevance to which he is committed by social demand.

This perhaps explains why most professional philosophers are very evasive about questions concerning the relevance

of their trade even when it is clear to them that they are unlikely to be left alone. For some of them the technique of avoiding such questions takes the form of expressive impatience, antagonizing enough to drive any inquirer into silence. Others, more sincere to themselves perhaps, declare their ignorance, albeit with a blend of guilt and shame — guilt for not knowing why they are paid for the job they perform, and shame for the lack of professional competence implied in their answer. Close to this category are those prepared at all costs to provide answers to issues they had not previously thought about. They put in the best their professional skills can afford, even when it calls for a redefinition of what philosophers do, often saying what philosophers ought to do rather than what they actually do. In the end what is achieved amounts to an intelligent expression of ignorance, but with a tag of insincerity which takes more than an ordinary mind to uncover. This, to say the least, is clear abuse of erudition.

But while philosophers generally feel uneasy about matters of relevance they are never reticent on questions concerning the nature of their discipline. They are always prepared to discuss issues about what constitutes authentic philosophical discourse, what is to be regarded as a proper philosophy and what is not. The deep concern and enthusiasm with which African philosophers have, in recent years, taken up the issue of whether or not there is African philosophy give the uncomfortable impression that that question itself is what constitutes African philosophy. But this is by no means a preoccupation that is peculiar to African philosophers. It seems that by the nature of philosophy in general, there are more of its practitioners whose main concern is that of sifting the sheep from the flock, the fake from the authentic. They are often generous enough to brand some philosophies as merely "peripheral" and others as mere allied fields. If you were in such areas as Marxist philosophy, philosophical anthropology or say certain "philosophies of", you would readily receive the impression that your place was somewhere else and not among professional philosophers. You might even be faced with the embarrassing question of how philosophically relevant your area of interest is.[1]

There are undoubtedly professions which have protective devices, means whereby the doors are shut against non-members to avoid professional prostitutes whose practices pollute the ethics of the profession. The medical profession,

to take one instance, has every reason to do so. Some might argue that philosophers also do, and that there is need to separate "true" philosophers from "fake" ones, or put mildly, to identify the professionals from the non-professionals.

There is what has now become an axiom in philosophy that seems indisputable among professionals, namely that the primary aim of philosophy is truth, not **usefulness.** This first principle had as its origin that initially unquestinable conception of philosophy as beginning with wonder. The philosopher was conceived as a man who wonders about the way things are, and how they became what they are. And in the process of doing this, the philosopher was supposed to arrive at the truth of such matters. It would be a mistake to think that this characteristic of philosophy has changed over the years. Still, it would be a greater error if it were thought that this process of reflection was devoid of usefulness. Philosophy, conceived as the search for truth, was not mutually exclusive with philosophy conceived in purely utilitarian terms.

It appears as if there are philosophers whose concern is more with retaining the image of their professional call, protecting it against alternative conceptions, than answering the demands for redefinition which the realities of change in modern society dictate. This concern is understandable if we go by the principle of continuity. No discipline can sever ties with its past since it is the past that gives inspiration to the present, while the present is expected to serve as a stimulant for the future. But along this continuum, innovations come in. Obsolete ideas are dropped and new ones picked up. To that extent, a radical redefinition of philosopy both in content and method - where contunity exists - sounds unrealistic. Indeed, the history of philosophy indicates clearly that efforts made by Kant, Hegel, Comte and Marx in the wake of modern science to retune the essentials of European philosophy were unsuccessful.

The polemics between the brand of philosophy prefixed "speculative" and that which now goes in the name of "critical" or "analytic" philosophy has always been one of some assumed differences in goals rather than in approach. The speculative philosopher feels that his approach alone is practically motivated; that he does his job in order to answer the riddle of life; that his efforts are geared towards framing a vision of life with a view to liberating himself from pain and

suffering. In other words, the speculative philosopher thinks that what he does is determined by experience with the hope that the outcome will provide a guide for the future. All this, he thinks, the analytic philosopher sets aside for something else distant from human experience.

It is true that the analytic philosopher has a less optimistic view about the potency of philosophy as a tool for directing human life. But it would be wrong to say that analytic philosophy itself is not practically motivated. In fact, most analytic philosophers believe strongly that their apparent preoccupation with matters of logic and language structure is closely tied to experience, which is in agreement with Socrates' dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living. It is doubtful if developments in science and technology would be what they are today without advancements in mathematics and logic which are products not necessarily of scientists themselves but of philosophical analysts. This way, no brand of philosophy may be said to be lacking in practical motivation even though the analyst may be more theoretically motivated.

There is however another kind of general criticism which Western philosophers raise against themselves. Many of them feel that philosophy by its very nature is an unprogressive discipline. True, philosophers appear to continue to discuss with all seriousness, the same questions that were discussed in Greece thousands of years back. The point of criticism here is not only that these philosophers are repetitive, but also that they are reflecting not on their own experiences but on the experiences of people as historically distant as the ancient Greeks.

Much as there is some weight in this argument, the modern European philosopher may immediately point out the continuity in European culture and experience, arguing strongly that the essential elements of the European past are indeed still operative in the modern era of European life. It is true that Europeans of today have learnt to fly jets or operate sophisticated machines. But that does not mean a break with their traditional heritage. Indeed, what we refer to as the modern European way of life is a continued system from the very distant past with continuous modifications — a little removed and a little added — as generations of men come and go. There is therefore some justification in talking about continuity in the European experience.

Even when one admits a gap between the European past and present, and therefore sees the modern European philosopher as reflecting on the experiences of his ancestors rather than on his own experience, one realizes that in the case of the African philosopher his sin is that he is not reflecting on the past of his own culture for there is little or nothing handed down — at least not in written form — for him to reflect upon. I do admit though that much work has been carried out by way of reflecting on the oral tradition of African cultures, at least since the dawn of literacy. But whether what is written has been properly done is an issue beyond my immediate concern here. It is perhaps safer to say that most of it is not philosophy.

The continuity between the European past and present is greatly reflected in the evolutionary world growth theory, a view purported to be a historical account of world civilization in general, but which, in actual fact, is the history of Western civilization. As Ernest Gellner rightly observes, Western history has become "**the** history of humanity". But the important point of referring to Gellner here is more on the elements of continuity he builds into historical development than whether it is Western or World history.

> Western history seems to have a certain continuity and a certain persistent upward swing - or at any rate, so it seemed, and so it came to be taught. Emerging from the river valleys of the Middle East, the theory of civilization seems a one continous and, in the main, upward growth, only occasionally interrupted by plateaus and even retrogressions ... Oriental empires, the Greeks, the Romans, Christianity, the Dark Ages, (a bit of a gap in the story), the high Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the new science, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, industrialization and struggle for wider social justice ... A picture of, on the whole, continuous and sustained and mainly indigenous upward growth, morally, intellectually, technologically is inescapable and gratifyingly suggested".[2]

Surely, there are defects in this kind of historical evolutionism, but such weak links do not assail the elements

of continuity so greatly emphasized by the theory. Even Karl Popper, in his efforts to make as clear as possible the distinctive features of the "closed" society as opposed to the "open" one, took great pains to stress the continuity involved in the transition from the former to the latter. "Thus when we say that our Western civilization derives from the Greeks we ought to realize what it means. It means that the Greeks started for us that great revolution which, it seems, is still in its beginning — the transition from the closed to the open society".[3]

True, Popper speaks of the breakdown of the "closed society" and the emergence of a new order marked by novel institutions and "thought that was free from magical obsessions", but he also assures us of how much of the old still lingers on: "our own ways of life are still beset with taboos, food taboos, taboos of politeness and many others".[4]

And, as if Popper suspected that this important point was likely to go unnoticed, he gives it greater emphasis again in his footnote.

> My characterization of the closed society as magical and of the open society as rational and critical of course makes it impossible to apply these terms without idealizing the society in question. The magical attitude has by no means disappeared from our life, not even in the most "open" societies so far realized and I think it unlikely that it can ever completely disappear.[5]

Popper made these remarks not too recently, and if Kwasi Wiredu writing in the 80s could assert confidence that "there are numbers of white men in London today who proudly proclaim themselves to be witches"[6] then the past of the European experience is not as gone as we are made to believe. It may be too sweeping to conclude that the essential elements of the European experience are still accessible for a modern European to reflect on. What seems undeniable is that what we refer to as "Modern European" thought is a blend of the past and the present. European historians hardly question Popper's statement that their 'Western civilization originated with the Greeks', although they give the impression that the modern is so distinct from

the traditional. Surely, the plant would cease to be a plant if the roots were severed.

It seems clear now why the questions that were discussed by the Greeks thousands of years back should be of serious interest to modern Europeans. The pioneering Greek thinkers have died but their thoughts and ideas have matured into what we now refer to as modern European philosophy.

Now, let us return to the predicament of the modern African philosopher. Supposing an African student chooses to study Greek philosophy, surely he will find it intellectually rewarding. Indeed, very few people would question the merit of seeking to know about the past of very distant people such as the Greeks. It may turn out to be the case, perhaps by coincidence, that their experiences were in some ways similar to those of our African ancestors; which means that by studying their works we may learn about our past or anticipate an intellectual future similar to what now obtains in modern European culture. There is great utilitarian value in all this once we are prepared to accept, without any moral objection, the unilineal theory of evolution that somehow by no fault of ours the Greeks just happened to be intellectually ahead of us in the race.

The Greeks were known to be men who cherished intellectual and moral excellence. Utility apart therefore, any modern academic wanting to know about the culture of such a people, how they lived and thought, even if such knowledge were considered an end in itself, would need to provide no further justification for his enterprise. It is true, after all, that the only way of learning to think is through a reconstruction of other people's thinking. And on a more general consideration, no knowledge can be said to be irrelevant. But that is not to say that some knowledge cannot be considered less worthwhile than others, which takes us direct to the crucial issue of what philosophical knowledge should be considered worth studying in view of the special predicament of modern African society.

However, before going into that let us raise another crucial but rather sensitive issue, that of what philosophical tradition the African is able to grapple with. The reason I regard this matter as sensitive is that it immediately draws attention to the issue of the mental ability of races, reminiscent of the Jensen uproar of the late 60s and early

70s.[7] What follows has nothing to do with either innate or acquired intellectual difference between one race or another. In other words, whatever I may describe as a deficiency or handicap is merely to be understood as a setback attributable more to lack of exposure than to some natural endownment.

By speaking of the predicament of the African philosophers, I am drawing attention to certain kinds of deficiencies of the individual practitioner dictated by his experience rather than by features that characterize the group to which the individual belongs. It is a deficiency due to the mere absence of given prerequisites and not an inherited disability. For instance, my lack of exposure to classical music till adulthood immediately places me in a handicapped position were I to attempt learning to read music. I may even become completely ineducable in that field. But that does not say anything about my intellectual endownment. It simply means that I never went along that path. I may even show higher intellectual competence in some area much more difficult than music. The average American student may show more competence in understanding the working mechanisms of a computer than the average Nigerian student. On the other hand, the Nigerian youth, particularly if he comes from the riverine areas, may show more competence in the understanding of the floating mechanisms of objects or about the complex behaviour of fishes, an area of knowledge in which his American counterpart may even be ineducable. Exposure and experience alone are the determining factors of ability in these varying fields.

Put in very clear terms, the problem resides not with the nature of the subject-matter but with the student for whom experience has selected certain areas and for whom others have been excluded. Psychologists and educationists are better in putting this in the correct language. In summary, the point I am making amounts to this, as far as philosophizing in Africa is concerned the deficiencies of the African philosopher do not amount to intellectual inadequacies. He is handicapped not as a matter of biological fact (i.e not by nature), but because his experience gives him one thing and he attempts to philosophize on another.

Earlier in this paper I tried to point out the continuity between the European past and the present. The conclusion

from this continuity in experience is that since experience provides the raw material for philosophizing, the European philosopher is very much at home when reflecting either on the experiences of his ancestors or on his own modern experience. Irrespective of temporal placement, the European does his reflection within a given culture and within a given experience. And this is what Mounce means by saying that "the savage differs from ourselves (i.e. Europeans) because he lives in a different form of society".[8]

Mounce's observations were made in relation to a very familiar problem raised by Peter Winch.[9] There is a fundamental difficulty, according to Winch, in seeking to understand an alien culture using the paradigm of "our own" culture. This is a problem sociologists and social anthropologists realized, even before Winch. But they had hoped that it could be solved through the intensification of field research and participation - what they regarded as the process of moving from the outside to the inside. This view is also accepted by many African intellectuals in the same fields. For them, the errors committed, so far, in what has been written in the area of African thought, are by outsiders who fail to realize that it takes more than a few years of field research to enter fully into a foreign culture and understand it thoroughly. The persuasive argument for this position is that the foreign investigator needs to share fully in the experience of the subject matter of investigation. He needs to be part of the culture he wants to analyse by understanding its symbolic expressions, language and history.

Although the above point against foreign investigators is usually made in relation to the general study of cultures, it also applies firmly in the case of philosophy. Turning the barrel of the gun against ourselves, one may now ask if the African philosopher is in a position to adequately analyse alien thought without the prerequisite experience that determines such thought, and with the paradigm of his own thought system.

Now, take the typical African student seeking to understand the reflections of Plato, Kant, Berkeley, Russell, etc. Psychologically, the subject matter stands as distant from him as the personalities themselves. The subject matter, for psychological reason, might seem more real and perhaps nearer home if instead of Berkeley or Kant it was credited

to, say, Wiredu, Sodipo or Bodunrin who are notable African philosophers. The African philosophers may regard these European thinkers as "founding fathers". However, because the African blood does not flow from the Europeans, their works are bound to be received as ideas devoid of the accompanying experiences. One may even take the more daring route, for example, of learning the German Language in order to understand Kant without realizing that understanding the German language is a far cry from sharing the German experience. The problem that any other non-German - speaking student interested in Kant would face a similar difficulty does not arise because such a student could share the German experience by historical affinity without necessarily being German-speaking.

The main point of this example is that the African philosopher interested in the study of Kant finds difficulties in understanding him not because of some genetic deficiency, but because the logic of Kant's reasoning is more intellectually accessible in the full context of certain aspects of the culture out of which his ideas originated. This does not mean that only African philosophers find Kant difficult to understand; it simply means that they require additional efforts to do so.

There are quite a number of factors in traditional philosophical practice which by their very nature tend to alienate the African professional philosopher from the mainstream of philosophy. I refer here to those who claim to be more 'philosophical' among African philosophers; those to whom, for example, symbolic logic, epistemology, metaphysics and indeed pure analytic philosophy of the Western type is **the** philosophy. Admittedly, this attitude is inherited from Western philosophers some of whom feel that not all those who profess to be philosophers are genuine philosophers. Unfortunately, the rate at which the attitude is dying out in the West is the same rate at which African philosophers are picking it up.

Quite a lot of intellectually stimulating arguments exist in the so-called core areas of philosophy. Exposure to such arguments serves the function of initiating the beginner. Repeatedly rehearsed, such arguments tend to be less stimulating. Thus the philosophy teacher sounds almost like the comedian who entertains his audience repeatedly with the same jokes. But, perhaps, it might be

argued that the comedian, like the philosopher, can continue to be in the market as long as his audience changes from show to show. What this means in the case of the philosophy teacher is that what he teaches will always stimulate his students only if they are always new students. This may be all there is to the business of teaching and learning at certain levels, but it is surely not a position of comfort for any professional philosopher to find himself in.

Apart from the issue of transmitting stale ideas from one generation to another, there are some dedicated philosophers and philosophy teachers who see danger in passing down certain types of philosophical ideas to beginners. Peter Geach for example, in his 'On Teaching Logic',[10] observes that there is a lot of "bad logic", that is formal logic, being taught to students. According to him, "Thousands of young people are infected with bad logical habits which may be harder to cure, and more productive of long-term evils, than physical diseases".[11] Geach's point goes further than the unproductive nature of formal logic. It is sterile, he points out, but its greatest damage to whoever takes it in is that it serves as a mental block. The point Geach stresses is that unlike other philosophical discussions in which the teacher and his student may disagree, each advancing his own reasons in support of a position, there is the master/apprentice relationship in formal logic. The rules have been laid down and all that is required is the ability to manipulate within the accepted rules. What seems obvious from this is that there is bad as well as good philosophy. Within the African context, works so far produced fall into the same categories and it is easy to point out the factors responsible.

As I said earlier, most contemporary African philosophers are Western trained. However, they fall into different categories. There are those who, although African by race, have spent a greater part of their lives in Western cultures. To some extent such African philosophers could be said to have partaken of the Western experience to the extent that the intellectual culture in which they were nurtured and educated is as familiar to them as it is to the indigenous people. They share the same language, mode of reasoning and, apart from minor differences, they are the same in intellectual orientation. There is yet another category of African philosophers who are African by race and have lived a greater part of their life in Africa. This category is

therefore predominantly African in intellectual orientation but with a little dose of Western education - this is the group of African philosophers that can be said to be caught between two intellectual cultures.

The first group of African philosophers with a full Western intellectual orientation are also very skillful in the techniques of philosophical analysis. But their dilemma is how to apply their acquired skills in answer to the new creed of relevance. There are two ways in which philosophers in this category have sought to make contributions. The first is a devotion to talking **about** the nature of African philosophy itself, what constitutes an African philosophy and whether or not such a philosophy exists. Kwasi Wiredu, Odera Oruka, Paulin Hountondji, Peter Bodunrin and a host of others have dwelt on this matter for years before they started to realize its futility.[12]

In the attempt to make some positive contribution to African philosophy, some of these philosophers have adopted an orientation intended to "assimilate the advances of analytic philosophy and apply them to the general social and intellectual changes in Africa".[13] I have criticized this orientation in African philosophy elsewhere.[14] Briefly, the points of my arguments are as follows: First, the process of "domesticating" Western philosophy amounts to a mere reformulation of known philosophical problems without actually attempting to solve them. Second, the orientation in most cases, such as in Wiredu's 'The Concept of Truth in the Akan Language'[15] and 'The Akan Concept of Mind',[16] amounts to no more than a process of linguistic translation in which age-long philosophical problems are recouched in African languages. Indeed, Wiredu's title of 'Formulating Modern Thought in African Languages'[17] betrays this point. And third, the process of "assimilating" from Western philosophy to African thought is likely to result in as many African philosophies as there are African languages.

This orientation in African philosophy rests on the belief that modern African philosophy can only be built on "the written traditions of other lands". And it is greately influenced by these scholars' interactions with the philosophical traditions of the West. True, if you presented a philosophical argument to a group of African students and you failed to reveal your source, the originator of the

idea, when and where it was written, you might have to find some other ways of injecting seriousness into your teaching. Or if you presented a conference paper on the Mind-Body problem, and you omitted mention of Plato's metaphysics through Descartes to Austin and Ryle, then you have not spoken in the language of your audience. This is the dilemma those in this orientation are seeking to overcome.

Now, the other orientation in African philosophy is dictated more by ideological commitment than by some professional requirements. This is the approach adopted by the second category of philosophy teachers whose cultural outlook is still basically African. In most cases, this orientation is in response to the creed of relevance and the impression that any philosophical discussion not tied to the African scene has no practical relevance. The character of works of this orientation is almost wholly descriptive and one example will suffice as an illustration. In 'African Philosophy and Existence' C.S. Momoh unfolds what his community believes to be the attributes of animals:

> Animals are as rational and as wise as men ... the concept of obedience is not foreign to animals ... animals recognize danger and have techniques of avoidance ... they even know what honour and dignity mean ... animals do not get into deep waters because they know they will be drowned.[18]

All this was written and presented as a paper on 'African Philosophy' to a group of philosophers. One now begins to see the sense in which the term 'African' has become a prefix for marketing anything. It is quite alright if the above information were being given to a foreign visitor totally unacquainted with the culture concerned or if it were simply a fable told to children. Unfortunately, so much of this kind of stuff is paraded as African philosophy in African institutions of higher learning. It is doubly unfortunate that students are more receptive to this descriptive sort of discussion than to more rigorous philosophical analysis.

The point is not that the quotation above does not attract some philosophical questions. It does, but the ability to unveil such questions depends on the creative skill of the teacher or student. One thing for sure, no matter how incoherent the beliefs in question may appear, the importance of reckoning with them simply lies in the fact that they govern the lives of a people. If, for instance, the reported information is true, that is, that the community holds the belief that "animals are as rational and as wise as men" one may ask the following questions: Could there have been any discrepancy between the belief as it is entertained by members of the community and the form in which it is reported? Is the reported belief couched in the idiom in which it is held within the community? When members of the community say they 'believe', is this intended to mean that they also 'know'? What would such a community regard as the distinctive features that distinguish men from animals? What could they possibly mean by 'rational' and 'wise' assuming that these terms have been adequately translated?

Now, such questions inject a great amount of philosophical character into the belief systems in question. The beliefs themselves or their descriptive accounts do not meet the basic requirements of philosophical discourse. Yet it is an orientation based on the raw materials of the African experience with which the student and the teacher share an affinity. This is what I find absent in the orientation aimed at "domesticating" Western philosophy.

It should now be obvious how the orientation I am proposing is implicit in any of the above questions. In an attempt to answer the questions, the philosophy that evolves will be uniquely African not only in content but also in methodology. I must, however, grant that in systematizing such a body of knowledge, the need may arise to draw on parallel arguments in Western philosophy. For instance, I have had the occasion of referring to J.R. Smythies' **Science and ESP**[19] in my course on African philosophy, not because I was not sure of my analysis of the philosophical problems posed by the phenomena of magic, witchcraft or oracles. Rather it was because I felt that the similarities drawn up by Huxley's article in the book between these phenomena and ESP would enrich the students' understanding of the

problem. Doing this is as distant from domesticating alien ideas as it is from providing a mere descriptive account.

NOTES

1. Admit that there are genuine grounds on which the identification of the core areas of philosophy should be made; it is perhaps necessary at the level of undergraduate teaching. But beyond that level one finds it difficult to see how Marxist philosophy or philosophical anthropology is less of a philosophy than say social and political philosophy, philosophical psychology or even philosopy of science.

2. Ernest Gelner: **Thought and Change,** 3rd Edition, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972, p. 12.

3. **The Open Society and its Enemies,** 4th Edition, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 175.

4. K. Popper, **Ibid.**, p. 173.

5. Footnote to Chapter 10 (p. 294) of Popper's **Open Society and Its Enemies.**

6. Kwasi Wiredu: **Philosophy and an African Culture,** Cambridge: The University Press, 1980, p. 42.

7. Arthur Jensen's **Genetics and Education,** (London: Methuen, 1970) was based on a research about differentials in Intelligence Quatient between Negroes and Whites. His publication generated a great deal of debate as some readers understood him to be saying that Negroes are innately inferior in intellect compared to whites.

8. H.O. Mounce 'Understanding a Primitive Society', **Philosophy,** Vol. 48, No. 186, Oct., 1973, p. 347.

9. Peter Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', **American Philosophical Quarterly,** Vol. 1, 1964, pp. 307-324.

10. **Philosophy,** Vol. 54, No. 207, January, 1979.

11. P.T. Geach **op. cit.,** p. 11.

12. See Wiredu's **Philosophy and an African Culture,** and his "On An African Orientation in Philosophy" **Second Order,** Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1972; Bodunrin's 'The Question of African Philosophy' **Philosophy,** Vol. 56, No. 216, April 1981, pp. 161-79; Oruka's 'The Fundamental Principles in the Question of African Philosophy', **Second Order.** Also Hountondji's **African Philosophy: Myth or Reality,** London: Hutchinson Co., 1983.

13. This quotation is part of the summary of Wiredu's theme on the cover (paperback, 1st Edition 1980) of his **Philosophy and an African Culture.**

14. See my **On An Orientation in African Philosophy,** forthcoming in the **Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies,** Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

15. In P.O. Bodunrin (ed) **Philosophy in Africa Trends and Perspectives,** University of Ife Press, 1985 pp. 43-54.

16. In **Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies,** University of Ibadan No. 3, October 1983.

17. An unpublished paper.

18. C.S. Momoh, 'African Philosophy and Existence', a paper presented at the conference of the Nigerian Philosophical Association, University of Lagos, February, 1982.

19. Published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967.