

THE RELEVANCE OF
SAGACIOUS REASONING IN AFRICAN
PHILOSOPHY

BY

ANTONY SUNDAY OSEGHARE

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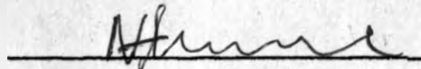
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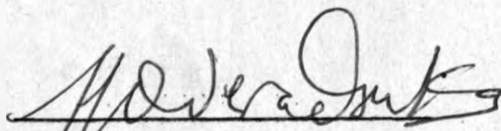
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ANTONY SUNDAY OSEGHARE

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This thesis has been submitted
for examination with our approval
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PROF. H. ODERA ORUKA
DR. D. A. MASOLO

To

M. A. with affection

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

I wish to express my sincere and grateful thanks to the two supervisors of this thesis: Professor H. Odera Oruka and Dr. Dismas A. Masolo for their invaluable advice and criticism which although sympathetic, was rigorous throughout. Their ability to provide this help shows, I believe, their depth and understanding of the problems which confront those of us who are genuinely concerned with the problems of African philosophy.

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C O N T E N T S .

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A B S T R A C T

In chapter one, I consider the two aspects of philosophy: the folk/traditional and the critical elements. I show that the claim made by Professor L.S. Senghor that 'emotion is African as reason is Greek' is unwarranted. I then argue that philosophy became a second-order enterprise in Greece with the philosopher, Thales in the Sixth Century B.C. and before then, the Greeks explained things in terms of myths and poetry. I suggest that there is no one method common to philosophy. On the theoretical aspect, I argue that there are two main classes of questions in philosophy: formal relations; and questions of fact. Following Professor R.M. Hare of Oxford, I place evaluative questions under logic, i.e. formal relations. The argument for this is basically that moral concepts have two properties which may be taken to produce a logic for moral arguments: prescriptivity and universalizability.

In Chapter two, I present a review of literature in the research in African philosophy. But first, I show that there is a relationship between philosophy and African philosophy. I examine and reject some claims to the effect that philosophy in Africa is or ought to be a unique enterprise in which the practitioners of philosophy and others only need to compile chronicles of folk/mythical beliefs. I argue that chronicles never

make serious philosophical treatise anywhere!

Therefore only those literature which are critical, rigorous and second-order in nature may be accepted as relevant provided only that they are grounded in African culture. From this point of view, I ask the very interesting question whether there is truly anything like British or American philosophy, i.e. whether the philosophies hitherto described and recognised as British and American do in fact have an affinity with the British and American cultures. I conclude that the literature which come under the general purview of these two heads are universalist and therefore not culturalist in nature. I then argue against Professor Hountondji's view that because philosophy is rigorous, critical, etc., it is science or like science. I trace this view in Hountondji to that of those logical positivist followers of Wittgenstein who wrongly thought that the certainty of logic and mathematics is compatible with the empiricist view that 'all intelligible propositions are based upon experience'. I make the strong claim that Induction is not Deduction.

In chapter three, I examine the phenomenon of sage-philosophy. But first, I analyse the concept 'sagacity'. I show that to be sagacious is to possess the ability to put practical knowledge into good use,

among other things. I make a distinction between folk and philosophic sagacity because a person, as in fact Ogotemmel, the Dogon sage was, may be wise and versed in the knowledge of the belief system of his people without being a philosopher. For, to be philosophic, I argue, a sage must also be able to distance himself from the communal views of his people in order to espouse a personal, individual philosophy. This second-order quality is possessed by the selected Kenya sages in this work. I show that both Fr. Placide Tempels and Professor John Mbiti misrepresent African Philosophy in their respective works. For, both scholars concerned themselves, in the main, only with the first-order communal ideas and even then, they were not often accurate in what they claim represents the content of African communal ideas. I explain the 'modus operandi' of the methodology which I use in the collection of data in this research. Here, I adopt the Socratic 'question and answer' method which Professor H. Odera Oruka used so successfully in his own researches.

In chapter four, the most significant chapter, I reconstruct and present the reasonings of the three selected sages: (1) Sage Mbuya shows that the Luo concept of time is linear. That all the peoples of the world must hold one God in common for nature is uniform. With many Gods, the universe would be pulled

in different directions thus creating chaos. He argues for equality of sexes. Then, he shows that man is superior to animal and that there is a cleavage between freedom and happiness. (2) Sage Ranginya shows that God is an idea, albeit a useful idea from pragmatic point of view. Thus God 'resides' in the wind for if it is true that God is everywhere, He cannot logically be a physical entity in whose image man is made. Now, Ranginya considers death as nature's way of easing congestion in the universe. Therefore, heaven is an illusion. (3) Unlike Ranginya, Sage Oigara argues for the view that God is a creation factor because of the mystery which the 'person' embodies. However, Oigara rejects the Kisii practice of explaining events through the activities of spirits as a ploy of encouraging good behaviour in society. It is better, he reasons, to appeal directly to the rational judgement of individuals. Finally, he points out that unwillingness to discard obsolete ideas is the greatest drawback symptomatic of the traditional society.

In chapter five, first I give an exposition of analysis and then show the significance of reconstruction in philosophy. Analysis, I argue, culminates in integrity of meaning or Occam's razor thus removing splurge from discourse. I show that philosophical reconstruction,

analogically, is like reform and reorganisation in society. For, it encourages deliberate thinking. I express the hope that other philosophers will critically examine this Study with a view to producing further reconstructions. In my analysis and commentary, I show not that the sages' arguments are unassailable, but that the wise men are involved in critical deliberate thinking which is what second-order philosophy requires. Therefore, the fundamental question is not whether a sage-philosopher is an African Plato.

In chapter six, the concluding chapter, I present this Study as making three main contributions to scholarship. First, it gives a coherent and systematic exposition of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular; secondly, it provides a methodology for research which will not breakdown because it is neither rigid nor dogmatic; and finally, this Study places on permanent record the ratiocinative thoughts of three African sages in the traditional milieu. The Study thus refutes the view that there are no non-academic Africans capable of second-order reasoning.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

For some ten years now, this question has exercised my mind: Why is it that in academia, scholars not only easily speak of, but also accept without hesitation, the view that there are various philosophies which are describeable as Greek, British, American, Chinese, Indian and so forth but never accept some philosophy to be appropriately known as African? The result is the feeling that there must be something amiss but with the clear understanding that mere feeling is not enough. I therefore involved myself in the very controversial debate on the existence or rather, what to some was the non-existence of African philosophy in the middle of the 1970's. I say 'non-existence of African philosophy' here because there were still those who rejected the view of an existence of African philosophy which other scholars had acknowledged some ten years previously.

However, this debate did not resolve the issue but only had the argument shifted to another level, i.e. what is the nature, and how is the content, of this African way of philosophizing to be described? Is it limited only to the philosophy of the European and American thinkers who trained the new crop of African philosophers and if so, is there any

warrant for describing this philosophy as African?;
and so on and so forth.

Some of these questions I have made an attempt to answer in the present work. But another question which now seems to me even more crucial and fundamental turned out in the process of this debate. This relates to the issue about the content and nature of African philosophy. And this, I believe, is due in large measure to the possibility of Sage-philosophy raised by Dr. Taaita Towett in 1959 and more recently, the research findings of Professor Odera Oruka in helping to highlight what he perceives as the thoughts of some critically outstanding wise men in the traditional African setting. Among these are people with neither training in philosophy as understood in the academic world; nor even knowledge of the art of writing. Their type of philosophizing became known as Sage-philosophy.

However, a sage may be limited only to the ability to recount the folk, communal ideas of his people in which case he is only a folk-sage. On the other hand, it was found that there are also the select few sages able to transcend the communal ideas of their respective people in order to espouse a personal, critical philosophy. These are the type of the sage-philosophers about whom the present work, in the main, is concerned.

Since this is something novel, it must be regarded as a philosophy in the making as indeed is the whole of African philosophy when taken in the academic sense.

The task with which this Study is concerned is both negative and positive. Negative in its attack of the sterility which afflicts the present state of philosophy in Africa and positive in its presentation of a more balanced and coherent exposition of the nature of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular. The view which is expressed here is that for anything to pass as African philosophy, first it must be a philosophical activity and secondly, this activity must be grounded in an African culture.

Now, if the view that philosophy is not concerned with agreement or consensus of opinion is accepted, then there must need exist a diversity of research types and methods. However, although the choice of research type and method is a matter for the researcher's judgement, I believe that the nature of the work itself must play the role of a determining factor in the choice. So, in making a choice, the researcher must give due consideration to the work at hand. For the present work, I have chosen a combination of a theoretical orientation with systematic empirical research methods. For a philosophical work, this combination is not an easy task to accomplish but I believe I have at least made a bold attempt.

In chapter one, I examine the nature of philosophy and its attendant problem of methodology.

CHAPTER ONE

PHILOSOPHY AND ITS METHODS

I. TWO ASPECTS OF PHILOSOPHY

1. The distinction between Folk/Traditional and Critical Philosophy

When the Senegalese poet and statesman, Professor Leopold Sedar Senghor made the statement 'Emotion is African as Reason is Greek', the African world was shocked and one might add, bewildered particularly because the statement came from one of Africa's most eminent and illustrious sons. Many were misled into thinking, whilst others had their ideas confirmed, that not only is it true that all there is in Greek is reason but also that this has always been the position. Although Senghor 'explained' his theory once again after much criticisms, his original position, I believe, remained unaltered. In his 1964 work, On African Socialism, he wrote: 'European reasoning is analytical, discursive by utilization; Negro African reasoning is intuitive by participation.'

First, the view that the African reason is emotive or intuitive whilst the European reason is analytical, rational, prosaic is a view which

needs to be strongly justified if by this it is meant that whilst the European is all reason, the African is all emotion since both reason and emotion are found everywhere. Secondly, we note from the history of philosophy that in the earliest period, man in an attempt to explain the nature and origin of the universe had recourse to myths and poetry. During this period, there was more respect for tradition than there was for observation.

I bring in a contrast between tradition and observation at this point because agriculture had been in existence since about 4500 B.C. Man himself has existed for one million years and has possessed writing since around 4000 B.C. However, it was as recent as 600 B.C. or thereabout that the Greeks started the rudiments of what we may take to be reflective philosophy in the critical sense. This came about when they abandoned their belief in a pantheon of anthropomorphic gods living in family groups for science although here again, science did not come into its own as a dominant factor in the lives of men until only as recently as the 17th Century A.D. and not without a lot of opposition from those school men who would rather prefer that tradition and authority remained as the main source of knowledge.

They even refused to look through Galileo's telescope because they 'knew' that the instrument was faulty or is it more because they were afraid of what they might discover! Now, the gods of the ancient Greeks, although immortal and had super-human powers, were subject to human passions and failings. But as the Greeks, in their quest for knowledge of facts, acquired the scientific skill of the application of general principles, they found that as they passed into ever larger generalizations, the introduction of the use of philosophical tool, i.e. reason, became inevitable. Thus the abandonment of the myriad spirits, gods and what nots for science brought philosophy into its own element.

So then, whereas you had something like 'Gaia married Chaos and begot Ouranos' the situation became, with the replacement of biological processes by material processes, e.g. 'Everything is really water' - Thales. Thus Thales became known as the first serious philosopher in the critical, rigorous sense. In his attempt to answer the question: 'What is the constitution and nature of Ultimate Reality?' he started an entirely new way of looking at problems. Thus, he not only answered the question but also made a systematic attempt at justifying the answer. Thus in giving an answer to the question, which

answer is water, he also explained that this is so because of the quantity of water that is OBSERVABLE in nature; and also its power and importance for life support.

Now, this attempt at the introduction of reason was in fact collateral, certainly from the point of view of the development of thought during this period, to the other philosophical task, namely the task of lifting the corpus of mythical ideas and beliefs received and held traditionally to the second-order level. Socrates, for example revealed certain inconsistencies in the religious beliefs of his people. He argued, justly in my view, that there was an absurdity in the then belief of the Greeks that their gods were good and at the same time violent drunkards and immoral. From this point of view, we can have a progression from folk to critical philosophy.

This progression takes place whenever attempts are made to systematically and critically analyse the corpus of beliefs and ideas grounded in myth and magic. In this earlier quest for knowledge, philosophers asked the question 'What is there really for us to know?' And the kind of answer which they came up with had been in conformity with what commonsense dictated. However, with the development of philosophical and scientific method, it has been found that commonsense has its pitfalls.

For one thing, it is variable in so far as the commonsense of one age is not that which it is acceptable to another age. Neither is commonsense universal when taken in the culturalist sense. For the ideas of the English, for example, differ from those of the Germans, etc., etc. In the religious arena, the Roman Catholic view of what is commonsensical differs greatly from those held by the Protestants; and Christians, generally where they agree amongst themselves, disagree with other religious sects often very violently.

From the point of view of commonsense, we usually form the judgement that an object is in reality what it seems. According to physics, however, when a person observes a physical object, e.g. a stone, what he observes is the effect of the stone upon himself. Yet science, and therefore physics is grounded in commonsense! Thus Science appears to be at war with itself. Now, the same water may appear warm and cold to the same person; a straight stick looks bent when refracted in water; a round coin lying on a table looks elliptical; etc., etc. It was this problem which led Bertrand Russell to the conclusion that science, when it

means to be objective, it finds itself plunged into subjectivity against its will. Naive realism leads to physics, and physics, if true, shows that naive realism is false. Therefore naive realism, if true, is false; therefore it is false.1

Therefore when one thinks that one is faithfully making a record of one's observations about the outer world one is really only recording observations about what is happening within oneself. Equally, when we are enjoined to observe, say, the 'significant facts', what we end up observing are the data of experience. So, I argue that 'significance' comes into play only through the synthesis which takes place in intuition. i.e. through the occurrence of insights. As for mere descriptions of the objects of experience, this can not be of much use since experience, given its nature, is more lively than any words which may be employed to describe it. And in any case, there is the possibility of illusion to which we alluded earlier.

So, from the early Greek thinkers who were mainly concerned with the problem 'what is there really for us to know?', we have in more recent times become more sceptical about our wholesale claim to knowledge. Philosophers are now more inclined to argue that something, which may seem to be is in actual fact non-existent. This in part led Professor A.J. Ayer to revive the old theory of Phenomenalism - the view that material objects are logical constructions out of sense-data. According to Anthony Quinton, the problem of perception is that of how 'to give an account of

the relationship of sense-perception to material objects.'² The problem here is whether there is this relationship, or perhaps more properly, correspondence from a philosophical point of view.

In order to successfully defend the thesis that there is a correspondence between sense-data and material object, it would be necessary to examine what, on the one hand, we describe as 'sense-datum' and on the other, 'material object'. But the Representative Theory of Perception clearly deny the possibility of an examination of material object because only sense-data can be directly observed and in any case, it is through sense-data that we can have any information about material objects. Thus the question arises as to how we can sustain an argument to the effect that there is an identity between two things if we have not yet began to understand how to describe one of the items!

Now, the recent debates on phenomenalism as an alternative theory of perception³ is a revival of an old argument since Locke and Berkeley are the precursors of the theory. This, I think, goes to show that philosophical arguments are never really settled once and for all. Therefore philosophy is a study in reasonableness, i.e. the on-going search for truth in the discipline is neither ever completely

successful nor defeated. This philosophic attitude, I argue, engenders a spirit of openmindedness which has made possible divergent philosophies like Existentialism, Marxism, Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, African philosophy, and so forth. The fact of the existence of these divergent views in philosophy makes it inevitable that no one method can be common to all. Thus nearly every outstanding philosopher has introduced his own method and system.

2. The General Problem of Methodology

Plato, the father of Western philosophy, deployed the dialectic method which was presented in the form of dialogue between persons in discourses. Before him, Socrates largely relied upon the method of interrogation. This was known as the midwifery (maieutic) method or, if you please, the Socratic irony. Incidentally, his philosophy was exposed entirely by word of mouth, i.e. orally in the 'Agora' (market places) of Athens although these discourses were later put into writing by his disciple, Plato. Socrates thus shows that writing, as Professor Odera Oruka has explained,⁴ is not a pre-requisite for philosophy. Indeed, a person first philosophizes before putting down his ideas in writing and the fact that either because of accident or lack of opportunity he is unable to record his ideas does not alter the fact that he has philosophized.

Aristotle, for his part introduced an entirely new method of philosophizing. Given his view that the analysis of concepts in an attempt to understand Reality is crucial to the enterprise of philosophy, he formulated some of those first principles of reasoning that are obligatory for correct and logical inferences in the operations of the mind. In the Organon, he put forward all those basic principles of logic which ought to be used in the analysis of Reality. In this analytical method, he identified a specific kind of inference which belongs to philosophy. This is the deductive method. The other kind, the inductive method, belongs specifically to the empirical sciences. Thus, Aristotle made the first methodological distinction between the sciences.

The scholastics by and large, followed the Socratic method as can be seen in the works of philosophers like St. Augustine, Duns Scotus and St. Thomas Aquinas (the Angelic Doctor). A very important change; one might even describe it as a revolution, in methodology came only as recently as about 300 years ago. This 'revolution' was spearheaded, amongst others by Francis Bacon, Galileo Galilei and Thomas Hobbes. In their endeavour to adapt philosophical methods of precedent time to the more science orientated spirit of their own period, they replaced the then current Socratic method with the inductive-empirical method. The aim

was to crucially, perhaps even once and for all, establish those basic truths about sensible reality which would be obligatory for a proper knowledge of the philosophical kind. How much success was had in this quest is a matter for conjecture for truth, as elusive as ever, turned out to be a phenomenon which cannot be had with certainty in the empirical sciences. Thus recent and contemporary philosophy became much less homogeneous in approach and therefore methodology.

The result is the multifarious schools of philosophy known by their specific methods:

- (i) Altruism: The ethical doctrine that the good of another must take precedent over one's own good. (J.S.Mill, Sidgwick & Royce represent this position).
- (ii) Critical Idealism: The theory that all known facts are within the realm of experience; whether or not there is anything beyond experience is indeterminable. (H. Cohen and Cassirer).
- (iii) Critical Realism: The theory that there is in the structure of reality a third realm of 'essences' in addition to the mental and the physical realms. (Santayana, Lovejoy and Pratt)
- (iv) Dialectic Materialism: The idea that ultimate reality is material and its mode of operation is through constant struggle of opposites (Engels, Marx and Lenin).

- (v) Existentialism: The theory which places greatest emphasis upon the self as the Ultimate Real and its inner struggles as basic fact of experience. (Heidegger, Marcel and J-J. Sartre).
- (vi) Intuitionism: The theory that Ultimate Truth is reached not by analysis but by an immediate grasp of its contents by the mind. (Whewell, Bergson and N.Hartmann).
- (vii) Phenomenalism: The view that material (The objects are logical constructions modern out of a set of sense data. version) (A. J. Ayer)
- (viii) Pragmatism: The doctrine that the test of the truth of belief lies in the way in which it works. (Peirce & W. James).
- (ix) Logical Positivism: The view that the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification. Founded by the members of the Vienna Circle and led by Moritz Schlick. Later to become Scientific Empiricism.
- (x) Scientific Empiricism: The theory of knowledge which places emphasis upon scientific method and appeals to sense experience. (Wittgenstein, Carnap, Ayer, Ryle, Black, Goodman, etc.)

What this suggests is that there is no single, recognized method of philosophy as a discipline. It is critical thinking or reflection expressible in a variety of manners and ways. This view, I believe led Wittgenstein to insist that philosophy is an activity which is, itself,

subject to philosophical investigations. For much the same reason, Professor Gilbert Ryle came to view philosophy as 'talk about talk' i.e. , second-order activity in which its practitioners practise the art of refining and explication and above all, argument in an endless process. One is thus bound to admit that the view championed, amongst others, by Professor Ayer⁵ that philosophy has been revolutionized and so must be 'done' rather than 'talked about', is extra-ordinary. And that is putting the matter mildly. No doubt, they were able to get together and congratulate themselves upon having achieved the truth.

In a reaction to a problem of a similar nature after Professor Ernest Gellner had attacked linguistic philosophy for limiting the enterprise of philosophy to a second-order activity, Professor Michael Dummett in 1960 had this to say:

I think that most Oxford philosophers would not be dogmatic on this point... they would not reject the possibility that philosophy could arrive at substantive truths: they would merely say that they do not see how this is to be done, and add that, while much past philosophy makes clear sense, understood as elucidation of concepts, they have not found a single convincing example of philosophical demonstration of a substantive truth.⁶

So then, I wish to say that the claim that, as a discipline, philosophy can demonstrate substantive truths stems, quite understandably, from the mistaken

view that it is possible to discover a criterion of truth which is at the same time general and sufficient and yet able to take account of the multifarious dimensions of knowledge in its relation to particular objects. But then, as Immanuel Kant has explained, because truth is concerned with this multifarious dimensions of knowledge,

... it is quite impossible, and indeed absurd, to ask for a general test of the truth of such content ...no general criterion can be demanded. Such a criterion would by its very nature be self-contradictory.⁷

Thus wherever people have made attempts to present unrestricted generalizations in philosophy, such attempts have usually broken down. Professor John Rawls' mammoth effort in A Theory of Justice, for example, appeals in an unrestrained fashion to general facts with regard to society and scientific knowledge. He described rather too boldly, I think, for a philosophical work, his attempt at providing an Archimedian point for judging the basic structure of society.⁸ It is reasonable, I argue, to suggest that Rawls probably accepts the view of Professor W.V.O. Quine (his associate) that there is no distinction between those matters which are analytic and those which are synthetic. This, it would seem, accounts for his (Rawls') view that a general criterion can be provided for the relation of abstract matters relating

to the general principles of justice and those judgements of value which are matters, on the whole, of individual judgement.

This mistaken view is grounded in the assumption that the behaviour of one group of people is good evidence and so can be taken as a general criterion for judging the behaviour of other groups of people. This assumption is false because individual human personalities are unique. And where you have a group of individuals acting such as in a society, their behaviour is that much more complex that it would take an omniscient mind to be able to forecast how and when the behaviour of one group can be repeated by another group. Since omniscient minds, from all available accounts, do not exist, I argue that the task which Rawls had set himself is simply an impossible one. And so, we for our part have no warrant to expect that he would accomplish the task. However, moral concepts do generate a logic as I explain in II (1), *infra*.

Now in the deductive method, for example as applied to logic, we are able to formulate the universal/general and necessary, but not sufficient, rules of the understanding. These rules are concerned only with the form of knowledge in so far as anything which contradicts them is necessarily false. However, the content or object of knowledge is an entirely different matter

altogether. This is so because, as Immanuel Kant has it,

... although our knowledge may be in complete accord with logical demands, that is, may not contradict itself, it is still possible that it may be in contradiction with its object. ... (Logic) has no touchstone for the discovery of such error as concerns not the form but the content (or object of knowledge).⁹

II. PHILOSOPHICAL THEORY

1. Classes of Questions in Philosophy.

There are two main classes of questions in philosophy, which in effect are the two species of reality. These are:

(a) Formal relations, i.e. nature of concepts, meaning of words, how words are used, and also evaluative questions. The argument for placing moral questions under logic (formal relations) is that moral concepts possess two properties: prescriptivity and universalizability, which together may be taken to produce a logic for moral arguments.¹⁰ The kind of logic which is produced here is the deontic logic, a branch of modal logic, which is derived from the substantive moral questions. There are two aspects of moral questions - the purely factual; and the conceptual or general substantial matters. It is important that these two aspects are separated for there is a

cleavage between them. We cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. Statements of value are not derivable from statements of fact. However, this is not to say that facts are not relevant to questions of value. Thus in saying that offenders ought to be treated equally, we can only arrive at a statement like 'If x ought to be put in prison for an offence, then y for exactly the same kind of offence ought to be put in prison' by unpacking a number of facts relevant to both cases in order to show their common elements.

(b) Questions of fact, i.e. purely empirical matters. In this class, a legitimate distinction, I think, can be made between those matters which relate specifically to scientific empirical investigations and those which relate properly to philosophical empirical investigations.

I believe this point can be brought out more vividly by the use of a paradigm such as the Muller-Lyer illusion; whether two lines are of the same length; and whether in fact railway lines do converge in the distance. In the purely philosophical empirical investigation of these paradigmatic cases of possible illusion, there is a complementary inter-play of reason and experience so that we come to the conclusion that although in the first case the lines appear not the same length, in reality they are of

the same length. In the second example, we say that given the nature of perception, railway lines appear to converge in the distance whereas everywhere they are really equi-distant. In cases of this nature, I believe, it is correct to say that Kant's synthetic a priori knowledge comes into its own because although we determine by reason that given the nature of perception, this is how things are, our first original knowledge came about by way of experience.

On the other hand, science has its own well established method which is demonstrated by its techniques of measurement with which perceptual mistakes of this nature are corrected. Thus we say in science that it is true that the lines are of the same length and false that they are not and equally we substitute the words 'true' and 'false' for 'appearance' and 'reality' in the example of the seemingly converging railway tracks. This distinction between empirical matters as they affect philosophy and science in the narrow sense is of the utmost importance because confusions have been introduced into matters of a purely philosophical nature when attempts are made to make such matters conform to the purely scientific practice. Whereas, science is the knowledge of facts by way of

general principles; philosophy is the knowledge of facts by way of reason which may, and in fact quite often do vary. This difference between science and philosophy is basic.

Now in the area of belief, for example, the view of the traditional people that there are witches, spirits, gods whose influences are daily felt by members of their society cannot be subjected to the requirements of strict scientific proof since it is not a matter in respect of which we can or indeed need go out in search of these spiritual beings. And yet, from a philosophical point of view, it may be allowed to say that there are spiritual beings without one being committed to, in the words of Ayer, 'the interpretation of those features which the use of the expression tacitly implies.' He goes on:

Thus in a society which believes in witchcraft it is perfectly correct in certain circumstances to say that a person is bewitched: the symptoms which are commonly regarded as the sign of demonic possession may be quite clearly marked: it does not follow, however, that demons really are at work.¹¹

So from this view, there is a clear distinction between what Professor G.E. Moore has described as a question of analysis and a question of fact. When we are dealing with matters of fact, given certain conditions, we can properly say that there are physical objects.

However, argues Ayer,

...it may be construed not just as claiming that these criteria are often satisfied but as affirming the common-sense view of what this satisfaction comes to; and in that case it is entirely open to philosophical argument. When it is a matter of interpretation, there is nothing sacrosanct about common sense.¹²

Equally, I shall wish to argue that given the right conditions, such as the empirical manifestation of the anger of a god or spirit in the form of sickness or misfortune in the traditional African environment, we should be able to claim that mystical phenomena are real even though they are not physical. From this point of view, the fact that a phenomenon is not physical is not justification for the claim that it is unreal as some researchers have argued. John Middleton, for example has given an 'eloquent' anthropologist view-point as to why

...there are no grounds in terms of Western science (sic.) for believing (magic) able to accomplish the ends claimed for them.¹³

Therefore, the anthropologist insists, magic can only be validated by scientific criteria or rejected! Another research scholar, Mr. E.H. Winter, has given his own reason why there is simply nothing like magic! Neither is there magic nor can there be magic because

....there is no evidence which indicates that Witches exist anywhere except in the mind of the Amba.¹⁴

But then Professor Ludwig Wittgenstein has explained that mystical phenomena are inexpressible because they only manifest themselves.¹⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that mystical things like spirits and what nots are not thought of as being observable unlike the physical objects of the phenomenal world. I argue that it is a mistake to think that a phenomenon in order to be real must be physical. In the absence of empirical substantiation, an empirical manifestation is enough to show, at any rate for the people concerned, that the phenomenon is real. Given the traditional African view that spirits are diffused through space, they cannot at the same time claim that spirits are physical without creating cognitive problems for themselves. The only 'physical aspect' which spirits have is their manifestation through ritual. If, in this practice, one wants facts, all one needs to do is to look.

However, in our search for facts, we must be careful not to lose our bearing otherwise we may find ourselves getting into all sorts of difficulties. But getting our bearing, getting right the context are in themselves not enough. We must also be careful to have the correct translation particularly when we are dealing with an alien language. A translation, I suggest, is correct only when it makes the same

sense in the translated language as it makes in the original language. Now, Mr. Martin Hollis got into a number of difficulties when he tried to highlight the traditional Yoruba of Nigeria ('traditional' not 'primitive' as Mr. Hollis misdescribed them) practice of treating with reverence 'Ibori' (the paraphernalia which is a conical material made of leather to which cowries are sewn in rows). Sacrifices are placed upon it, during the process of the propitiation of 'ori' (the innerhead), with regard and respect. Now according to Mr. Hollis and his source,

Certain primitive Yoruba carry about with them boxes covered with cowrie shells, which they treat with special regard. When asked what they are doing, they apparently reply that the boxes are their heads or souls and that they are protecting them against witchcraft. Is that an interesting fact or a bad translation.¹⁶

Well now, one thing is clear, there is nothing particularly interesting about this 'fact' when examined from within the Yoruba Concept of a Person. But the translation is no doubt a bad one. The simple way to test it is to translate back into Yoruba and it will not make any sense whatsoever. Clearly, this Yoruba account of 'Ibori' was made very light by the poor rendition into English word for word instead of sense for sense. For example, the so-called 'box' is a conical material made of leather to which cowries are

sewn in rows. And the 'heads' or 'souls' in the English version is 'Ori' or innerhead. This misrepresentation of the Yoruba World-view is the result of the type of confusion which can arise from attempts to translate ideas and concepts in an original language to another. It highlights, I believe, in clear terms the problem of 'Verstehen' - whether subjective understanding can cross cultural boundaries. As I shall try to show later with respect to the question whether a non-African can sufficiently understand the African mind, the answer is 'No', or at any rate, 'Not Yet'. But first, I examine the theoretic aspect of philosophy as an activity.

2. Philosophy as a second-order activity.

In as much as philosophy transcends the limited causal empirical commonsense world into the realm of reason, philosophical theories 'per se' are thought to be not generally amenable to empirical examination. They are therefore often neutral to matters of fact. What is usually the bone of contention therefore is not whether this or that event will take place but rather how anything that happens is to be described. In the main, philosophy is therefore concerned with talking about talk. This places it at second-order level. But this is not to mean that philosophy can only be

approached from this one point of view as we shall see presently. Now, philosophers ask questions such as:

- What is mind?
- What sort of relation is causality?
- What is the nature of Belief/Knowledge?
- What is truth?
- Etc., etc.

The main problem of methodology is how these questions are to be taken since the philosopher who asks the question, 'Do physical bodies exist?' is not, in the strict sense, merely asking an empirical question. Neither is the philosopher interested in the meaning of words 'per se'. Certainly not in the sense of the lexicographer's interest. The philosopher is more concerned, surely, with the analysis of the words. Thus we have a philosophical distinction between the use of an expression (object-language) and the analysis of the words used in the expression (meta-language). This is not quite as easy as it may at first appear but let me explain. Suppose that I say 'I love Ethel', the lexicographer will certainly tell us that the word 'love' can be used in various senses. The ordinary man who understands how words are used in the English language will find no problem with this.

However, the philosopher's job does not stop here since the understanding of how words are used is only a necessary first step. This understanding is necessary but not sufficient. In his analysis, the philosopher may say, for example, that the word 'love' does not mean the same thing when I say 'I love Ethel' and 'I love philosophy'. Or indeed, when I say 'I love John'. His problem is to delineate what these various senses of the verb 'to love' are. It is problems of this kind which bring the philosopher into an apparent conflict with the layman who, for example erroneously think that physical objects are in fact what they seem.

Thus the philosopher argues that although naive realism and commonsense, both have the same thing in common, they give us a false sense of the appreciation of the universe. The philosopher, therefore, without denying the occurrence of these things, advises caution in our wholesale claim to knowledge particularly when these claims are based upon sense experience. A classical example is to be found in Hume's argument that in a causal chain, the antecedent 'C' and the consequent 'E' are infact two completely distinct and separate events. And that it is because of their having been constantly conjoined in the past that we erroneously think that they will continue to be conjoined in the future. There is no compulsion in the one, i.e. (cause)

such that the other ,(effect) necessarily follows.
Therefore we are estopped from deriving an
inferential judgement from matters of fact.

In chapter two, I give a critical analysis of the
literature of African philosophy culminating in a
substantive definition of African philosophy and a
distinction between culturalist and trans-culturalist
or universalist philosophy.

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CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

- A Literature Review -

I. THE NATURE OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

1. The relationship between Philosophy and African Philosophy

As I have attempted to show in chapter one, philosophy in the rigorous sense began when men seriously turned their attention to the investigation of the nature of the Reality which constitutes the furniture of the universe. And yet, Thales who gave the lead did say somewhere that all things are full of gods. No doubt, this was another way of saying that material things are moved or pushed or if preferred, caused by the activities of spirits and what nots. This theory is certainly not unlike that which is grounded in the belief in animism which today is still very rampant in many traditional societies of the world.

However, that may be, there is a less tendency to explain things in this manner in the more science orientated societies because of the great strides which science has made in the last one hundred and fifty years or so. And even then, there is clear evidence for the view that life

is not reason alone. This in part, explains our view that philosophy should be viewed from the point of view of a discipline with dual aspects, i.e. the traditional, folk, uncritical; and the critical, reflective and rigorous. The question therefore arises what is to be made of the presuppositions inherent in the thinking of some contemporary scholars that African philosophy is made up of the literature consisting of the mythical communal world-views of the traditional African peoples. Such scholars, however, are mainly ethnographers, anthropologists and theologians.

Now, what of the opposite extreme view that philosophy is only the critical, rigorous, systematic and intellectual enterprise and nothing else. Therefore, they claim, since Africans have not hitherto exhibited this kind of 'systematic' thinking, there is nothing like philosophization in Africa. The conclusion is obvious: there is no African philosophy.

2. The two views

The latter view itself can be split into two, namely: the extreme view and the moderate view. The extreme view is represented by Professor Robin Horton's article¹ in which the British anthropologist claims that not only is it the case that there is no African philosophy, according to him, because African thought lacks logic

and epistemology, but that there is no possibility of an African philosophy coming into being now or in the future. Thus he denies a whole people the ability to think. Therefore, concludes the scholar, Africans should content themselves with ' "Philosophy of" African Traditional Thought.' The argument which he adduces for this view is full of sophistry. Consider this:

...all the terms which follow "of" in the various "philosophies of" refer to ways of using language to get a grip on the world which are not in themselves philosophical. ...it must in principle be possible to have a "philosophy of" African Traditional Thought.²

Well now, this extremist view surely must itself be unphilosophical for philosophy as a non-dogmatic, non-doctrinaire enterprise does allow for both first-order and second-order inquiries into the nature of the universe and its contents.

The moderate view is represented by Professor H. Maurier who in an answer to his own question, 'Do we have an African Philosophy?' replies thus:

The answer must surely be : No!
Not Yet!³

At least Maurier does allow for the possibility of African philosophy at a future unspecified date. I argue that even though this view is a moderate denial of African philosophy, it is nevertheless an erroneous

one. For, as Professor Kwasi Wiredu has observed, there are African philosophers who are currently engaged in the production of 'African philosophy'.

Now, as to the first view, namely, that 'African philosophy' is composed only of the communal views which permeate the traditional environment, we may take the Ghanaian poet and scholar, J.E.G. Casely-Hayford (1866-1930) as representing this position. He was able to speak of Africa as the

Cradle of the world's systems and
philosophies and nursing mother of
its religions. 4

But then, Casely-Hayford was a poet and from that fact, it is perhaps understandable that he was more concerned with first-order systems. There are other attempts which wrongly project mythical and religious ideas as 'African philosophy'. I examine two main representatives of this position in chapter three. So then, we see there are broadly two views of what African philosophy is all about, namely:

- (a) African philosophy as mere chronicles. From this view point, African philosophy is nothing more than African traditional or folk/mythical philosophy and so the duty of the philosopher is one of merely compiling a chronicle of these traditional, folk/mythical beliefs. For, the mistake here lies in the fact that chronicles never make serious philosophical treatises.

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(b) African philosophy is composed of the literature which are critical, rigorous, systematic and second-order in nature. There is a corollary view to this, albeit a mistaken one, that philosophy is science in the sense that it is rigorous, critical and systematic. Professor Hountondji in fact posits a very interesting view of a kind of

... kinship between philosophy and the sciences ... (thus science provides) **the** infallible criterion by which to judge the absurdity or relevance of any proposition in philosophy...⁵

II. THE LEGACY OF LOGICAL POSITIVISM

1. Scientific Philosophy?

Now, in pursuance of this view of an affinity between philosophy and science, Professor Hountondji further suggests that philosophy, because of its theoretical nature, 'belongs to the same genus as algebra, geometry, mechanics, linguistics, etc.' No doubt, this view has its pedigree in the earlier attempt of the logical positivist school to

convert philosophy into science. But John Passmore has explained that those logical positivists of Wittgenstein's inclination thought wrongly when they claimed that Wittgenstein had shown that

... the certainty and the "ideal" character of mathematics (can) be reconciled with the empiricist doctrine that all intelligible propositions are based upon experience. 6

This logical positivist view may well have wholly, or at any rate in part, led Bertrand Russell to advocate a 'scientific philosophy'. Moritz Schlick, himself a prominent member and one-time leader of the Vienna Circle had argued against his colleagues who claimed that science could replace philosophy.⁷ Russell, no doubt, was concerned with the problem of epistemology, i.e. how much of what we describe as knowledge of the external world could justifiably be called knowledge. However, this attempt led only to the conclusion that no such knowledge was possible having as its methodology the seemingly endless process of pairing, refining and cross-checking the details of the attendant complexities. Russell, himself in a discussion in 1918 admitted that the analysis of complex things could go on without end although he would prefer to talk about facts rather than complexes. Now as for facts, according to Russell, they are made up of simples although 'there is a difficult argument.'⁸

2. Linguistic Analysis

However, the latter Wittgenstein decided to pursue an entirely new kind of analysis which became known as 'linguistic analysis', i.e. the rejection of the concern with problem about how meaningful language can be made to conform to a world of facts. Thus the metaphor of picture theory gave way to the metaphor of use theory in which attention was concentrated upon the uses and implications of language in epistemological claims. Russell strongly disapproved of the new philosophy because he felt it had betrayed the lofty ideals of empirical science from which a virile philosophy could only be developed. Even after many years, Russell was still very adamant and uncompromising. He, for example, 'regretted' that philosophy was being made cheap and so accused Mr. G.F. Warnock of belonging to the so-called 'philosophy-without-Tears' School', etc., etc.⁹ So then, the attempt to make philosophy into science is due, I think, to the view that philosophy must be made virile, vigorous, etc. However, just as Russell was before him, Hountondji is wrong in his claim that philosophy and therefore African philosophy belongs to the same class as the natural sciences.

The distinction of philosophy from science is not merely that science investigates the world and philosophy investigates this investigation at meta-level. This

separation is crucially at the level of abstraction, i.e. philosophy is concerned with 'categorical' analysis whereas science is grounded in the general laws of which the cornerstone is empirical evidence. This is, of course, science in the restricted or narrow sense. From this restricted view of science, even the philosophy of science is not properly describable as 'science' but meta-science.¹⁰ And our research method of combining a theoretic philosophical orientation - 'a priori' method - with a systematic empirical investigation - 'a posteriori' method - is compatible with this view of science since at no time, even when we are pursuing our empirical investigations, do we leave behind us our philosophic tools of analysis. To this extent, we are in agreement with Kant's view that 'a priori' methods are never complete without also bringing into focus matters relating to experience because

...(Logic) has no touchstone for the discovery of such error as concerns not the form but the content (or object of knowledge).¹¹

And again,

...Thoughts without content are empty,
intuitions without concepts are blind.
...Only through their union can knowledge arise.¹²

So then, the present position of philosophy in Africa can only be understood clearly when placed in a general world-view perspective, i.e. although philosophy does not have

a rigid universally agreed definition because of its nature, on the whole, we can say which kinds of activities may pass as philosophy and which may not. And Africa, or more properly, philosophy in Africa cannot be an exception to this rule. The process of philosophizing in Africa therefore is not unique. It must be the same theoretic process as elsewhere. We have, hopefully, left behind us the episode in the history of philosophy in Africa when 'debased' and 'unlogical systems' were described as specially African! Professor Odera Oruka brought out this point very forcefully in his caricature of such attempts thus:

What may be a superstition is paraded as "African religion", and the white world is expected to endorse that it is indeed a religion but an African religion. What in all cases is a mythology is paraded as "African philosophy", and again the white culture is expected to endorse that it is indeed a philosophy but an African philosophy.¹³

Not only is this practice commonly found in religious and philosophical debates but also in areas of politics and economics.

III. SOME MAIN PROBLEMS FOR PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICA

1. The 'Negritudists contribution' to the Civilization of the World

Over the past sixty years or so, there has been upon the African scene, a proliferation of literature which has been claimed to represent the origins of African philosophy by some commentators.¹⁴ These material have originated mainly from three sources:

- (a) Negro American Renaissance of the diaspora period between the two world wars;
- (b) Negritude movement from the beginning of the second world war to the present time; and
- (c) Ethnographical and anthropological works, the writings of some religionists and the efforts of other miscellaneous visitors to Africa.

For the present, we shall be concerned only with the first two of the above sources; the third being reserved for a brief discussion under 'Ethno-philosophy: Two misrepresentations' in chapter three. But first, I want to make a point of clarification with respect to the revolt of the American Negroes which revolt was

epitomised by the Harlem style poetry of the period between the two world wars. During this era, there was clearly no unanimity or consensus of approach for there existed two distinct and opposing camps. There were those who, following the inclination of W.E.B. DuBois, had argued vehemently that Negroes ought to reconcile themselves to their then situation instead of allowing themselves to be 'torn asunder'. They were urged to divest themselves of the schizophrenic feeling of

two-ness - an American, a Negro:
two souls, two thoughts, two
unreconciled strivings; two warring
ideals (all) in one dark body...15

Thus Du Bois and his followers recommended a struggle for equality with their white fellow Americans.

Now, on the other side of the great divide, there were those who followed the trail blazed by Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden who argued with equal force and cogency that seeking after equality was a wholly futile exercise and therefore, according to him,

The African must advance by methods of
his own. He must (thus) possess a power
(which is) distinct from that of the
European.16.

Marcus Garvey, however, carried Blyden's argument a step further by suggesting that American Negroes should return 'home' to Africa.

So then, the revolt of the Harlem style poetry was followed by the self-awareness of the Negro Renaissance which in its turn led to the Negritude Movement. These Negro poets allowed themselves some impertinences which gave their almost wholly white audiences immense thrill particularly because of the elegance and style which these Negro artists exhibited in their poetry. They were, of course, not just good artists, they were also very prudent men and women for they knew how far to go too far. They never went too far and so never seriously run the risk of the displeasure of the white Americans who paid good money for their entertainment. Countee Cullen, for example, composed a poetry with an unsurpassed artistry about a white woman who, in her indolence,

Even thinks (if she thinks at all) that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black Cherubs rise at seven
To do the celestial chores.¹⁷

No doubt, the American Negroes of this era clearly had very good reasons to resent the kind of treatment to which they were subjected by their fellow Americans of European origin. Even then, they were Americans not Africans just as their white counterparts were not Europeans but Americans.

Therefore, I argue, the important question here is whether the Negroes were fighting in order to

change, or at any rate ameliorate their situation or indeed whether they were concerned with the 'yet to be established' state of philosophy in Africa. I make the strong claim that this particular Movement in America is irrelevant to the development of philosophy in Africa. For clearly, there is a cognitive difference between Africanist philosophy which in effect is philosophy about Africa with the disastrous and often pernicious effects it brought in its wake; and African philosophy which is our present pre-occupation in Africa. No doubt, too, the self-awareness, the going back to roots, and so forth was linked with the continent of Africa only because it was felt that Africa provided a useful ploy in their struggle against their oppressors. Afterall, there were those in their rank who themselves were of mixed blood. They never claimed their European half, now, did they?

But then, even if it were true, as some commentators have claimed,¹⁸ that all self-conscious societies revive, or is it 're-live', their past glories, origins and therefore histories in order to discover their socio-political and economic position in the world, I argue that once this limited objective of discovery is achieved, there ought to be the end of this backward looking episode. Sir Thomas Browne explains this negative view and its attendant inconsistency so pungently in 'Pseudodoxia Epidemica' thus:

It is the humour of many heads to extol the days of their forefathers, and declaim against the wickedness of times present. Which notwithstanding they cannot handsomely do, without the borrowed help and satire of times past; condemning the vices of their own times, by the expressions of vices in times which they commend, which cannot but argue the community of vice in both...19

So, any attempt to meet current 'vice' by appealing to the events of the past only forces one, albeit unwittingly, into praising the 'vices' of times past; the result is 'vice' compounded. And yet attempts are made to actually project these so-called past glories into the future, i.e. even going beyond the present. It would appear, given the ramifications of this process, that the originators of this projection are not sufficiently aware of the sterile nature of their thesis. It is, I think, instructive in this context to take notice of Fanon's words:

... all the proofs of a wonderful Songhai civilization will not change the fact that today the Songhais are underfed and illiterate, thrown between sky and water with empty heads and empty eyes. 20

Consequently, any attempt at the propagation of anachronistic ideas in society ought to be discouraged.

Now, when Aime Cesaire originated the concept of 'Negritude' in his epic work or perhaps more fittingly battle cry:

Return to My Native Land, in 1939, it was not expected to culminate in the denigration of all that is African. However, the Africanists took it over and turned it into all manner of things. In this work, Cesaire was concerned in the main,

to show what was to him the sovereignty, harmony and glory of the past Africa in freedom and dignity. To this, he opposed the then current alienation of the black people by their erstwhile colonial masters. Thus his main pre-occupation was that of getting a revolutionary action going in order to re-establish this 'sovereignty, harmony and glory'.

However, it was Professor Leopold Sedar Senghor who popularized this concept of Negritude. Whereas Césaire paid a great attention to the possible use of the concept in aid of revolution, Senghor was concerned more to use it as a means of bringing about the politics of cultural identity. For some one like Senghor who was 'trapped between two races, two cultures, two ways of life' this move is quite understandable. So, as a result of this alienation and 'asynchronic' (a term which the Argentinian sociologist Gino Germani coined to describe the clash of two cultures in the underdeveloped countries of the so-called third world: one old and anachronistic and the other contemporaneous with modern times), Senghor felt the need to assert his 'African dignity'. This problem did not arise for the peoples of the English speaking West African countries because the British, unlike the French, did not interfere with the culture of Africans in their former colonies in West Africa.

Now, Negritude has two distinctive characteristics, namely:

- (i) The return to the 'glories' of the past; and
- (ii) The rejection of reason because as some of the exponents of Negritude thought, albeit wrongly, reason was identified with the white man and so was the 'enemy's' preserve: for, 'emotion is African as reason is Greek' says, Leopold Senghor. I discussed this question in chapter one.

The result, among other things, is what Jean-Paul Sartre aptly describes as the Negritudist 'anti-racist racism' in his justly celebrated Black Orpheus. However, the explosion of the Negritudists in Africa as well as in the diaspora is explainable in terms of the insults which some racist white men were hurling at the Negro race. A representative example of this kind of diatribe is what Price-Mars had described as the white man's made-up stories that

Negroes were humanity's rubbish, devoid of history, morality, or religion, whom it was necessary to fill with new moral values by any means whatsoever.²¹

Notwithstanding the fact that the Negritudist movement was established to counter those insults and provocative statements such as the one just mentioned, I think that a sober reflection will reveal that much of what followed were simply negative and often times bordering on the ludicrous. For, these Negritudists

were unable to justify their position when they were later on confronted with the question: how was the development of culture and philosophy in Africa furthered by the emphasis which they had placed upon sentimentality and irrationality.

Even Fanon, in one of his rather emotional moments was found to reject reason, wade and wobble up to his neck in irrational thoughts. He described this experience thus:

I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back towards unreason ... I waded in the irrational. Up to the neck in the irrational.²²

Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the President of Zambia, too expressed the feeling that irrationality or at any rate, the acceptance of what he termed 'contradictory ideas' by the African may well 'be both profoundly right and more humane.'²³

My own view is that a different way out must be found. Rather than indulge ourselves in the sanctimonious sermons on the return to the anachronistic swamplands of primitive existence or make fashionable ideas which are unlogical or irrational, whether in jest as poet would or in earnest as a politician might, these pernicious and unwarranted insults could be adequately met by focusing upon those positive and wholesome elements in the African culture. For, African could and are indeed

entitled to highlight with a certain degree of pride, the humanism and the non-supernaturalistic morality which they practised in their traditional environment.

I argue that anti-racist racism, self-denigration. irrelevant escapism into, and the puerile glorification of, the past are not attributes worthy of any free people. What then is the implication of all these for African philosophy? For surely they have implications.

In Senghor's opinion, the 'strength' of Africa is discernible in her ability to combine rationality and irrationality, the so-called association of reason and imagination. Therefore in this 'strength' lay her contribution. However, Senghor admits:

It is not a question of sending France to an African school; it is not even a question of assimilating African elements of which French writers and painters have begun to be aware (Africa) can help France to uncover her original and authentic fact that lies beneath the ugliness which modern evolution has superimposed.²⁴

On the other hand, for Fanon, the question is not one of saving Europe from itself. Like Césaire before him, Fanon thinks Europe is better let alone to destroy itself. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon characteristically argues:

Europe now lives at such a mad reckless pace that she has shaken off all guidance and all reason, and she is running head long into the abyss; we would do well to avoid it with all possible speed.²⁵

It is this inexorable urge in Senghor to help out Europe that, at any rate in part, motivated him in the fabrication of a system which it was designed to 'save' Europe at all costs. Hence the injection of irrationality (African non-logical brotherly human warmth) into rationality (European logical, prosaic, matter of fact, etc., etc., disposition). Thus, this essence of non-logical, emotive irrationality is, from the point of view of the Negritudists and their Africanist collaborators, what Africa is capable of contributing to the development of knowledge and so scholarship. In other words, this, in concrete terms, is what to them African philosophy is all about. It is not difficult, I think, to see the quagmire into which this way of thinking has landed philosophy in Africa. Is it surprising therefore that some non-African researchers even when confronted by evidence, prefer to indulge in reveries.

Now in his extraordinary view of the concept 'African thought', Mr. W.A. Hart claims that it means exactly the same and no more than 'African traditional thought'. Thus, the scholar concludes:

... when people (I take it he means his own people) speak of African Thought they always mean, I think, "how Africans traditionally, have thought", " how the African mind works": consequently it seems to be an open question whether a philosopher, qua philosopher, should be interested in African Thought...²⁶

Clearly, the author is saying that African thought can only be taken to mean African traditional thought.²⁷

This confusion can be explained in one or both of two ways, namely:

First, that those foreign scholars who see nothing but traditionalism in Africa and scientism in the countries of the West commit this fallacy because they are ignorant of the traditional element within their own culture.²⁸

And secondly, there is the idea that whenever there is evidence of systematic thinking in black Africa, there must of necessity be found a pedigree in ancient Egypt or in the Mediterranean lands. This is why W.E. Abraham took Mrs. E. Meyerowitz to task over Akan deities.²⁹ Professor Abraham chided the scholar for failing to take cognisance of historical evidence with regard to her comparison of certain Akan (Ghanaian) ideas about the divine kingship and the social, political and religious institutions with those of ancient Egyptians. For, since she was unable to cogently show that any Akan of the ancient period ever lived in ancient Egypt, she was estopped from concluding, as she in fact did, that Akan ideas of divine kingship were 'inherited' from the ancient Egyptians.

So now, which is the way forward for surely progress must be made. Perhaps progress could be made by way of an examination of the works of some African philosophers in the field but first, what exactly is the meaning of culturalist and transculturalist or universalist philosophy?

2. Culturalist and Transculturalist or Universalist Philosophy: A New Orientation

I have mainly concerned myself in this work with certain questions of philosophy which relate to the critical analysis of theories and ideas rather than the history of these theories and ideas. Thus my attention has been directed not upon the influence of this or that philosopher but rather upon an examination of the arguments which are adduced in support of the various theories and ideas.

Now, when we examine philosophy in ancient Greece we find, for example, that Aristotle and Plato produced works which are relevant to and arise out of the Greek culture and tradition. Let us, for convenience, describe this kind of works as forming the literature of Greek cultural Philosophy. However, we do know that Aristotle and Plato also wrote on general philosophical problems: problems which are in nature transcultural and so even today, after two thousand years still excite us. These are problems such as whether we are determined or free, whether we can justifiably claim that we know, whether there are rights and wrongs independent of opinion, what indeed is rational opinion?, the problems associated with the concept of truth, and so forth.

So then, under culturalist philosophy, we have such literature as have a special explicit affinity with the folk or traditional culture of a given society. This literature includes first-order level philosophies and also the critical examination of these at second-order level. Thus our Sage-Philosophy comprises literature of communal world-view of a society together with the individual reflections upon these communal ideas by certain sages. And when we come to transculturalist or universalist philosophy, we find a corpus of literature which consists of reflections on philosophical problems and/or a particular method of examining these problems. Examples of these are logic, epistemology, linguistic or analytic philosophy.

Clearly, therefore, these pertain, in the words of Professor Oruka, to the 'philosophy of human intellect'. Here, we find that we have to develop and use certain skills and techniques which are of universal application in much the same way as we take physics, for example, as transcending any particular culture. In this case, as we shall show presently, such kinds of work cannot properly be ascribed to any particular people or culture for they are of universal applicability and not embedded in any one particular culture nor indeed does it uniquely inhere in any one people's view of life.

3. Professional African Philosophers.

Now, the practice of philosophy in Africa is, I argue, more interesting and more rewarding than philosophy in the West from the fact that African philosophers are, or at any rate ought to be, able to produce the two types of philosophy of which exposition I have just rendered. These are the culturalist and the transculturalist/universalist philosophy. Thus at the cultural philosophical level, Africans produce philosophy which is embedded in the African culture. This is, to all intents and purposes, the only reason why such philosophy is uniquely 'African'. However, where an African scholar writes in an area of philosophy which has no special affinity with African culture, then such works are inadmissible into the corpus of literature of African philosophy. It is therefore, from this point of view, conceivable that a person is both a philosopher and an African but does not in fact make any contribution to African Philosophy if, for example, his works relate only to what we have aptly described as transculturalist/universalist philosophy.

Therefore given its nature i.e. that it is both African in origin and orientation, African philosophy must be produced by Africans themselves. As Professor Alexis Kagame almost said,³⁰ it is my belief that

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Therefore given its nature i.e. that it is both African in origin and orientation, African philosophy must be produced by Africans themselves. As Professor Alexis Kagame almost said,³⁰ it is my belief that

only an African can successfully penetrate the true African mentality. However, this is not to be taken to mean that the interested competent foreign scholar is 'forbidden' from taking part in the debate about the content and nature of African Philosophy. The point here is that any foreign scholar who wishes to take part in this debate must first be willing to acknowledge his limitations given the fact that it is a philosophy embedded in a culture which is alien to him. However, there is a possibility, albeit a remote possibility, that a foreign scholar who has acquired a first hand experience of African culture and social life can competently contribute to the debate.

Now, it is important that our construction of these works satisfy certain three basic conditions so that they are in line with philosophical works elsewhere in the world. These are reflection, analysis and systematization. For, unlike the claims of the Negritude men, we are not concerned to make the false assertion that there is a distinctly and so unique African conception of the universe. Senghor's claim, I argue, that 'Reason is European or Greek as Emotion is African' is unjust for: 'reason' and 'emotion' are found together always everywhere. Neither is the exclusive preserve of any particular people or

race. The Universe is one and so is its apprehension. Thus, from a logical point of view, there cannot be two views of Reality. However, the report of the apprehension of Reality may vary for: given the fact that the stream of sense-data is unique to each individual, no two persons and 'a fortiori' two peoples or races ever report the same apprehension in quite the same way.

If I am successful in my major thesis that the conditions necessary for philosophy must with equal force apply to African philosophy then African philosophy 'ipso-facto' is composed of the first-order and second-order aspects. Therefore, whatever ideas, values and beliefs which are African can be related or compared with similar ideas, values and beliefs from any other part of the world provided only that first-order African traditional philosophy is not compared with second-order, rigorous philosophy from elsewhere.

In so far as we compare like with like then we will find that African philosophy is not a unique philosophy. Our main concern is that of placing philosophy at the service of the various African cultures, in the same way as Professor Wiredu was able to use the analytic tools of philosophy to examine a traditional Ghanaian culture.³¹ Wiredu, upon his examination, found three factors which he described as pernicious to societies generally and so ought to be eliminated if progress to modernity is to take place. The interesting thing here

is that although Wiredu's efforts were directed at the examination of the culture of the Akan people, one of the ethnic groups in Ghana, he was able to extrapolate his findings on Ghana and Africa with attenuation of content because 'there are deep underlying affinities running through these (traditional) cultures.'³²

I would like to go further and suggest that we can indeed claim that what is true of a traditional culture in Africa is true also, 'mutatis-mutandis', of other traditional cultures elsewhere in so far as we take the word 'traditional' in the anthropological sense. This, I believe, marks very clearly the important distinction between a genuine element of a traditional society - the core factors found present in a traditional Ghanaian culture and what is, or more appropriately, what can only be taken (if true which it is not) as a human weakness of the Akamba and Gikuyu peoples of Kenya.

Rev. Dr. John Mbiti had claimed that because the Akamba and Gikuyu lack the 'concept' of distant future time, African concept of time is cyclical, i.e. time moves from 'sasa' (present) to 'Zamani' (past) with no cognisance taken of the distant future. Mbiti's thesis fails to stick because the Akamba and Gikuyu do conceive, for example, that it takes between thirteen and sixteen years for a child to reach maturity.

It is also self-contradictory because, logically, a person cannot understand the statement that something happened, say, ten years ago without understanding that there was a 'present' time when 'ten years ago' was 'ten years hence'. since the present becomes the past only because the future becomes the present. More about Rev. Mbiti's idea of African philosophy later.

Now, to Professor Hountondji's definition of African philosophy³³ which definition Professor Wiredu finds 'progressive on the whole'.³⁴ Hountondji is prepared to include among the literature of African philosophy works which have nothing specifically to do with African culture provided such works are produced by African philosophers. But what are his reasons? Well according to Wiredu, it is because

No one can deny, for example, that Mathematics and science ought to have an eminent place in education in contemporary Africa. If so, it can hardly be sensible (sic) to suggest that research in the philosophy of Mathematics or the methodology of science automatically puts a contemporary African philosopher outside African philosophy simply because such work may have no special links with Africa.³⁵

Professor Wiredu justifies this view by citing the two philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the influence of Karl Marx upon the development of philosophy in contemporary Russia and China. Professor Wiredu

describes Wittgenstein as a German. In fact, Wittgenstein was born in Vienna in 1889 and became a British subject in his middle age before he died in Cambridge in 1951 although this is not crucial to the argument which I wish to advance. But now, what exactly do we mean by British or American or German or Russian philosophy? I think our own definition of African philosophy - the philosophy produced in Africa by African philosophers and grounded in African culture - leaves no one in any doubt.

Now Wittgenstein's first philosophical work the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, i.e. philosophy done in accordance with the new development in Logic, was first published in Austria in 1921 and subsequently in England a year later. In this work, Wittgenstein was mainly concerned to show how language is possible in describing the world, stating facts and also what is true or false. Language is supposed, according to this theory, to mirror states of affairs in which objects are engaged in the world, hence the metaphor of 'picture theory'. And the first edition was in German, not in English! We should note also that the distinguished 19th century American philosopher, Charles Peirce, did develop an elaborate Theory of Signs. So did Locke and Hobbes of course.

The point, however, is that the problem with which Wittgenstein concerned himself was a purely philosophical one, i.e. philosophy 'per se' - certainly not British,

not even German nor anything else specifically. And so, we now consider as Linguistic Philosophy, the second philosophy posthumously published under the title Philosophical Investigations in 1953, two years after the death of Wittgenstein. In this later work, Wittgenstein repudiated much of what he had said thirty years or so earlier in the Tractatus. Here, Wittgenstein was concerned to show that language is a public social reality which it is necessary to investigate with a view to finding out how it may mislead us in our thinking about the world before we embark upon the enterprise of philosophizing. The thesis which Wittgenstein presents here is that we cannot significantly speak of a 'mental life' for there are no such things as mental images or experiences. This became known as the metaphor of 'use theory'.

So then, the question which arises now is how do we classify the works of the contemporary American scholar, Noam Chomsky, if we have already 'pinched' Linguistic Philosophy for Britain. Although, here again, Bertrand Russell and Professor G.E. Moore were precursors of this philosophy, they themselves having developed it in reaction to Hegelian idealism or probably more properly, the idealist followers of Hegel. So how much of it was in fact provoked by Hegel? There was this rather eccentric idea that there

is a 'Western science'. Professor Robin Horton compared it with African traditional thought which he equated with African thought as if all there is in African thought is traditionalism.³⁶ Whereas, there is a sense in which we may reasonably speak of a tradition of science in the West or anywhere else for that matter, it is misleading or at any rate unhelpful to appropriate a universal concept like science or certain philosophical concepts which may be used as tools-such as linguistic analysis - for a particular part of the world or people.

Professor Alexis Kagame used linguistic analysis to examine the language of the Banyarwanda. Here we say he has used the tools of philosophy not the tools of British philosophy! As to whether the result of the work is satisfactory or not is irrelevant to the issue. This can, I believe, with justification, be described as part of African Philosophy because what he has done is use a philosophical tool - that of analysis - to explicate the nature of an African language. On the other hand, philosophers like Wittgenstein merely presented these 'tools' for use on any language what so ever. If our position is allowed, no doubt, much of what is currently described as, for example, British or American philosophy would come under increasing questioning and why ever not? What, for example, is 'British' in Bertrand Russell's The Principles of Mathematics? or 'American' in

Professor W.V.O. Quine's Word and Object? The fact that this way of treating philosophical literature is 'traditional' or perhaps more appropriately 'sterile' is I think the strongest argument for its discontinuance. Afterall, no one has ever described Jenner's vaccine as 'British'.

One final point on this question of 'literature'. It is refreshing to note that, as a result of our conversations, Professor Odera Oruka has now come to have 'some doubts' about the efficacy of treating such works as Logic, Philosophy of Mathematics or Science and such other works as forming part of the literature of African philosophy, i.e. philosophy which is embedded in an African culture.

However, the literature forming the corpus of philosophy in Africa as distinct from the more narrow based African philosophy will no doubt include these works which are in the universalist sense of philosophy providing always that such works are produced by Africans. This body of literature, philosophy in Africa, will also include all the works pertaining to the culturalist sense of philosophy which we have aptly described as African philosophy. It follows, therefore, from our position that for an African philosopher to be able to lay claim to expertise in African philosophy, the scholar ought to have done some relevant work in the area of African philosophy and not merely that he has

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contributed to the production of Philosophy in Africa if his contribution is philosophy in the universalist sense.

This is the basis upon which we are questioning the efficacy of the tradition of describing wholesale all philosophical works produced in Britain as British or those produced in America as American. A more appropriate term would be Philosophy in Britain or Philosophy in America unless it can be shown that there is some particular aspect of British or American culture inherent in the respective works.

In chapter three, I examine and analyze Sage-Philosophy in Africa. Then I present an appropriate research method into sagacious reasoning.

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CHAPTER THREE

A N I N Q U I R Y I N T O S A G E P H I L O S O P H Y

I. SAGACIOUS REASONING IN AFRICA

1. The relation between 'Practical Reason' and 'Sagacity'.

Although both 'sagacity' and 'cleverness' involve the acquisition and use of skill, the former presupposes wisdom of a practical nature. For surely, when we speak of 'sagacity', we usually have the image or idea of wise or sound judgement which is achieved through and increases with old age. Yet, although there is a sense in which we may properly say that sagacity involves knowledge, it would I think be misleading, if not fallacious, to suggest that 'sagacity' and 'knowledge', are synonymous. Thus, to be sagacious is to possess the ability to put knowledge of a practical nature into good use, among other things. For, 'sagacity' is a much wider concept than 'knowledge' and does infact encompass it.

However, we are not merely concerned with the question as to how the concept 'sagacity' is put into use. We are certainly concerned more to show how a sage may in some cases also perform the role of the critical philosopher for a person may be wise and

yet not have the ability to philosophize at the second-order level. Therefore, whereas all sages are philosophers at the commonsense, first-order level, only a relatively small number acquire the ability to philosophize at the second-order level. Our interest here concerns this small number who we shall call philosophic sages.

Given this explanation, there would appear to be an inherent confusion implicit in the judgement of Professor Peter Bodunrin¹ that the Yoruba 'Onisegun'² and the Luo sage, Mzee Paul Mbuya³ are of the same genre. More about this presently. Thus we see that sagacity is contained in the concept 'philosophy' when taken in the broad sense. As already explained, 'sagacity', strictly speaking, does not mean the same thing as 'cleverness'. For whereas, 'sagacity' does depend upon maturity of age or judgement or both, 'cleverness' does not.

So then, there is clearly no doubt that we do speak of sage-philosophy. For there is a sense in which philosophy can be expressed through practical reason which expression becomes critical when pure reason is applied. So it is possible to have two stages, as it were, of sagacity, namely, the sagacity which stops at the practical commonsense level i.e. knowledgeable in the beliefs, ideas, etc.,

of a culture. Here there is an exertion which comes about only by doing something extra. That 'something extra' may be taken as ratiocinative thought or inquiry.

2. Folk and Philosophic Sagacity

So, whenever we have the sage who is only versed in the communal ideas of his people, let us, following Prof. Odera Oruka, call him the Folk-sage. The sage who is able to distant himself from the ideas of his community and so expound a personal as opposed to communal, second-order, ratiocinative thinking, we shall call the philosophic-sage. From this, it follows, I think, that Ogotemmel, the late revered old Dogon sage is an example of a Folk-sage and Mzee Paul Mbuya, the late 'Ker' (Ultimate Moral Leader) of the Luo people of Kenya, a Philosophic-sage.

It is very propitious, I think, for philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular, that Professor Odera Oruka met and held a series of recorded conversations with Mzee Mbuya before his death. And from the report in Oruka's paper, which paper contains by far the most illuminating explanation of Sage-Philosophy to date, 'Sagacity in African Philosophy'⁴, it is evident that Mzee Mbuya made a significant contribution to Professor Oruka's research efforts on the importance of Sagacity in African philosophy.

We shall rely on this and other research findings available in the Department of Philosophy here at Nairobi in the present work. We shall also adopt the same method of approach in our conversations with other sages.

Central to this method of approach is the researcher acting the part of a philosophic-provocateur but staying in the background as much as possible and yet now and again 'provoking' the sage by offering him an alternative view to his argument.

I will now give, in contradistinction, a brief consideration to the expositon of the Dogon beliefs by Ogotemmeli; and the personal ideas of Mzee Mbuya. Marcel Griaule was not under any illusion about the result of his work among the Dogon although the English translation was inappropriately titled Conversations with Ogotemmeli⁵: for it was not the case that Professor Griaule met Ogotemmeli as an interlocutor in the sense in which the Athenians of the time of Socrates met in the 'agora' to exchange ideas. These Athenians met as equals whereas Griaule met Ogotemmeli so that the sage might explain the Dogon religion and world-view to him. On the question whether Ogotemmeli was to impart his own views or those of his community, Madam Dieterlen who wrote the Introduction to the book clearly stated that:

... the Dogon took their own decision (through) the elders of the lineages of the double village of Ogol and the most important totemic priests of the region of Sanga... that the more esoteric aspects of their religion should be fully revealed to Professor Griaule. To begin this they chose one of their own best informed members, Ogotemmeli ... (through whom) the meandering flow of information is faithfully reported. ... the progress of this instruction by Ogotemmeli was being reported on daily to the council of elders and priests.⁶

Two points are at once clear from this, namely: first, that Ogotemmeli was his own people's spokesman. He was selected by his people who therefore monitored what was happening at the sittings for instruction. And secondly, the sage was not concerned to give Professor Griaule his own views about the ideas of his people. Indeed, he was selected because it was firmly believed by his peers, the other elders that he was the person most likely to represent their religion accurately. A philosophic - sage, if the Dogon had one, would never have got the job. So, Ogotemmeli was a Folk - sage and Professor Griaule was his 'student'. Is it not irrational to criticize this or that Pope for failing to introduce 'revolutionary' changes into the Church dogmas since, given the nature of things - the will of God and so forth, a 'revolutionary' is very unlikely, ever to get the job of Pope. It must be expected that Popes do only those things which uphold Church teaching.

On the other hand, Professor Odera Oruka chose Mzee Mbuya as one of his interlocutors because his preliminary investigations revealed that the sage entertained ideas of his own as distinct from the general communal ideas of the Luo with which Oruka is already acquainted being a Luo himself. It would have been a very eccentric thing to do had he gone to Mzee Mbuya to collect data on certain common words, even ideas, knowing these to be common knowledge. This is what makes the work of Professor Sodipo and Dr. Hallen on Yoruba epistemology rather puzzling. In the Sodipo/Hallen exercise, first the Yoruba were chosen as a group upon whom to concentrate their project, then they chose the 'onisegun' (masters of medicine) as their professional contact group. For what purpose? Well, according to them, for the purpose of undertaking 'a research project into Yoruba (traditional?) philosophy.'⁷ So there we have the answer. They were concerned with the general communal ideas of the Yoruba as an ethnic group and that is what their findings revealed all the philosophical trappings and dressings notwithstanding.

I suggest, therefore, that this effort is of the same type as Professor Griaule's work among the Dogon except that Griaule never at any point suggest that his work is anything but ethnological. However, both works may pass for philosophy at the first-order level. Thus we have the two aspects of philosophy: for the Dogon

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and the Yoruba projects are both good examples of folk - philosophy. And then we have the personal ideas of Mzee Paul Mbuya in some significant ways clearly differing from the communal ideas of his people. This surely is what philosophy at the second-order is all about since it is not unlike the philosophizing of Socrates except that Mbuya did not meet the same fate as Socrates. For, Mbuya, unlike Socrates, was an accepted sage to his people. Socrates, despite his wisdom, was seen as the spoiler of the youth.

And yet Professor Peter Bodunrin describes, in his own words, 'the individual Kenyan (sage)' for example, Mzee Paul Mbuya as a 'traditional (meaning folk) sage.'⁸ By so doing, he fails to distinguish between the kind of sage (folk) who expounds or simply narrates a communal philosophy and the other kind of sage (philosophical) who puts forward his own reflections often at variance with the popular views of his community even at the risk of his people's displeasure. There is however some justification, I think, in Professor Bodunrin's stricture of the Sodipo/Hallen approach: for this approach did not rise above the folk level of philosophy. Now let us examine two misrepresentations of ethno-philosophy and so examples of what African Philosophy is not.

II. ETHNO-PHILOSOPHY: TWO MISREPRESENTATIONS

The question why the researches of Rev. Fr. Tempels and Rev. Dr. Mbiti which no doubt mis-represent certain world-views of Africans were given such good reception has over the years disturbed many African scholars. And worse still, these works were regarded, mostly outside Africa as being representative of African philosophy. Perhaps Professor Odera Oruka is right when he offered the suggestion that to some people any rationally defective work or system or idea is considered as 'alright' provided of course that it is African.⁹

These two scholars, at least, have one thing in common - they are both religious believers. Let us see if there are other common grounds.

1. Fr. Tempels' very own Bantu Philosophy

Because he lived and worked among the Baluba of the former Belgian Congo for a number of years, Fr. Placide Tempels came to the interesting conclusion that he was more than qualified to explain, on behalf of the Baluba, their ontology. This ontology, he claims, is explained ONLY in terms of forces. Thus whereas the European concept of 'being' is that which is; for the Bantu, 'being' means force. This kind of naivety was betrayed by a leading modern British anthropologist, Mrs. Mary Douglas in her claim that

the relation which the native has to his external environment is mediated by 'daemons and ghosts'. She further claims that the behaviour of these so-called daemons and ghosts are expressible in terms of forces of which behaviour

is complicated and unpredictable, which we (the Westerners) encounter in our environment more simply and directly. This latter advantage we owe to our wealth and material progress which has enabled other developments to take place. So, ... the primitive is ultimately at a disadvantage both in economic and spiritual field.¹¹

No doubt, the claim to superiority in the economic field to which Mrs. Douglas has alluded is in respect of the massive technological acquisition which her people have amassed through the systematic exploitation of these 'primitives'. However, what she means by saying that the 'primitive' is spiritually disadvantaged is not immediately clear. What is clear is that the consistent attempts by anthropologists and other Western scholars at explaining traditional African apprehension of nature and reality in terms of the activities of myriad spirits and what nots is explicable, I argue, in terms of their prejudice that whereas they are logical, prosaic, matter-of fact, etc., etc. in apprehending nature and reality in scientific and so rational way, the 'primitives' can only see reality as the activities of spirits through the manifestation of 'forces'. Nothing can be further from the truth, certainly as far as the Bantu are concerned.

For this view to succeed, it will have to be true that the Bantu (not Fr. Tempels' Bantu) are unable to distinguish things logically since in that unreal world, everything is seen only as 'forces'. This position in Fr. Tempels is so bizarre that one feels bound to ask whether there are such people anywhere who confuse things in this systematic manner. Now, where there is a disagreement as to facts, as in this case, an empirical examination of the issue in dispute may help to resolve the matter. To this end, Professor Okot p'Bitek has decisively shown, in my view, that the Bantu neither see nor do they, as a matter of empirical fact, describe their world in this confused fashion.¹²

There arises, for example, also the necessity for asking a philosophical question, namely, whether the work under review measure up to the minimum requirements which are usually expected of philosophical works. Thus we find, in the case of Fr. Tempels' Bantu Philosophy that he has simply failed to carry out the systematic analysis of the alleged world-view of the Bantu people who were the subjects of his research. If he had taken the trouble to carry out this examination, he may well have discovered that the theory which he was propounding was not only false but also downright implausible. But perhaps Fr. Tempels was blinded by the arrogance and egotism of the Europeans of his period into thinking that Africans are incapable, unaided, of providing a

systematic exposition of their ontological system.

Consider this piece of paternalism:

We do not expect the first African who comes along...to be able to give us a systematic exposition of his ontological system... It is our task to trace out the elements of this thought, to classify them and to systematize them according to the ordered systems... of the Western world.¹³

When stuff like this myth of unconscious system of belief emanates from perfectly respectable and seemingly sympathetic scholar like Fr. Tempels, of all people, one tends to become despondent about human nature. It is not unlikely that this kind of arrogance made Aime Cesaire in a letter to Maurice Thorez in 1956 say this:

...in Europe, in all parties, from the extreme right to the extreme left, is ingrained the habit of doing for us, the habit of thinking for us, in short, the habit of refusing us the right to our own initiative ...which is, in the last analysis, the right to (our own) personality.¹⁴

No doubt, the theoretical approach to the study of the Bantu which Fr. Tempels had mapped out for himself, if only he had followed it, satisfies what philosophical methodology in broad terms requires, namely, that one ought to

... begin by a comparative study of the languages, modes of behaviour, institutions and customs of the Bantu; ...analyse them and separate their fundamental ideas; ...(then) finally construct from these elements a system of Bantu thought.¹⁵

And yet this is precisely what the researcher failed to take an account of at the most crucial point in his work: for Fr. Tempels goes on to suggest that where one's research work is among a totally different people from oneself, in order to be successful, one must pay more attention to living

...their life with them ...listening to their intercourse one with another than by pursuing systematic investigations.¹⁶

I believe that a systematic investigation is an absolute necessity in a research of this type in order for the researcher's conclusions to follow logically from the empirical data which are available to him. This is in the nature of philosophical enquiry which demands a combination of a theoretic approach and an empirical investigation where appropriate. In any case, parodying the objects of one's research, that is to say, looking 'upon life as they do'¹⁷ is itself an unattainable feat because this would inevitably involve the researcher in having to become one of the objects of his research and at the same time the researcher. He would thus not be able to see things clearly because he would have introduced the confused element of thinking himself one of the objects of his own research.

As if the situation is not already confused enough, Fr. Tempels then further suggests that it is not only possible but positively desirable that

One is recognised by them as one of themselves, as genuinely Bantu, by reason of one's having come to understand their wisdom. This kind of understanding proves to be far more a matter of experience and of intuition than of study. ¹⁸

There is at least one thing about which there is no doubt: Fr. Tempels was a very optimistic man. Might it not be fair to infer that the missionary did not start with a clear understanding of the kind of research work which he was embarking upon. At any rate the result shows clearly, I think, that even if Fr. Tempels at any point in his study did entertain any notion of carrying out a 'systematic study' of the Bantu, as he himself rightly explained was necessary,¹⁹ he no doubt abandoned this idea without explaining why he changed his mind.

So then, even if Fr. Tempels' mis-construal of Bantu ontology had been a correct representation of the Bantu world-view, we would still have found it defective on the ground that the second-order discussion and analysis needed to turn facts, ideas, beliefs and so forth into philosophy are simply not present. Such work, at best, are fit only to be described as ethno-philosophy. They remain at the first-order level because they are mere chronicles of the ideas of a people. 'Chronicles' as I explained above, and philosophical systems are two different things.

Now, it has been argued, and I think without a modicum of justification, that the likes of Fr. Tempels, because they were engaged in a metaphysical exercise - 'an act ultimately of intuition or sheer mental speculation' - they need not feel the immediacy of critical assessment and analysis of facts.²⁰ But since the researchers claimed they were involved in a philosophical enterprise, then they cannot escape the kind of hostile reception philosophers have accorded them. And justly too. The question here, properly, is not how nice or sympathetic they were to African cause but rather whether their works are good philosophical works. It is much more difficult to fathom the reason behind Rev. Mbiti's monumental mistake since he is himself an African.

2. Rev. Dr. John Mbiti's research effort.

It is now rather fashionable that modern African Christian theologians in their bid to sell christian religion to their people do unwittingly dress African gods in Hellenic robes.²¹ But when we are presented, as we indeed are in Rev. Mbiti, with wholesale, unrestrained generalizations and even in some instances, christian ideas put forward as African and all this in the name of African philosophy, we feel obliged to ask the question whether African philosophy ought not to be saved from its 'saviours'. The reason which Rev. Mbiti adduced for his generalization that Africans lack

the concept of distant future time is discernible, I think, in what he takes, albeit mistakingly, to be the cyclical concept of time of the Gikuyu and Akamba peoples. Rev. Mbiti came to this extraordinary conclusion because, as he says, he was unable to find a verb-tense which corresponds with the English word 'future' in the Gikuyu and Akamba languages. More on this later but it must be noted that Professor Odera Oruka in his own researches found that the same Gikuyu and Akamba peoples, among others, do as a matter of fact '...have a word or (an) expression for the future',²²

Now, in his book, African Religions and Philosophy, Rev. Mbiti explains that his reason for emphasizing 'the unity of African religions and philosophy' lies in the fact that he wants to be able 'to give an overall picture of their situation.'²³ However, in doing this, the author committed the fallacy of the myth of primitive unanimity which Professor Paulin Hountondji has aptly described as the trademark of communal philosophy. This myth consists in the erroneous belief that

in 'primitive' societies - that is to say, non-Western societies - everybody always agrees with everybody else. (Therefore) in such societies, there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but only collective systems of belief.²⁴

But then, the study of social sciences has shown very clearly that holistic explanations of social phenomena cannot be given because any account of the collective ideas of a group of people presupposes the existence or at any rate, the possibility of a 'group mind' by the personification of 'society'. Thus Professor Ralf Dahrendorf explains that

Society is patently not a person, and any personification (or reification) of it obscures its nature and weakens what is said about it.²⁵

Rev. Mbiti further claims that he is entitled to 'use the singular, philosophy, to refer to the philosophical understanding of African peoples' (p.1) because some form of philosophy is evidenced by the religious beliefs of the Africans in the traditional setting. Now, although there is a sense in which we speak of philosophy as being behind the ideas, beliefs and ways of life of a people, surely we cannot mean philosophy in the 'singular' critical sense. This is the 'vulgar' traditional philosophy, i.e. the sense in which we say that everybody is a 'philosopher' because everybody takes a philosophic view of his circumstances in his everyday activities. The philosophy here is certainly not the 'singular' personal one, it is communal.

On page 2, we found Rev. Mbiti apologising for presenting as philosophy the result of 'my own process of philosophizing'. But in so far as this process leads to 'personal' philosophy, i.e. philosophy at the second-order level, no apology need be made. But this is precisely what Mbiti failed to do. For the kind of arguments and synthesis which could have transformed traditional beliefs and practices into philosophy properly-so-called are missing. And this deficiency is quite apart from the fact that the claims Mbiti made for the traditional African are not African but christian. For example, on page 90, Mbiti claims that the traditional Gikuyu exorcise their children by shaving the hair on the children's head 'in the form of the cross'. The suggestion here seems to me clear. Namely, that Africans in the Gikuyu country before the advent of missionary christianity had christian ideas so had no difficulty imbibing christianity when the missionaries arrived.²⁶ But nothing can be further from the truth. This practice in fact was explained by Jomo Kenyatta in his Facing Mount Kenya as long ago as 1938 and in his explanation, Kenyatta said that this practice of shaving children's hair is in a peculiar fashion not that it originated from christianity and the hair was shaved forming a sign²⁷ of the cross not in the form of the cross as Mbiti suggests. One wonders why Mbiti, given the fact that he took the idea from Kenyatta's book, did not eschew deviation or at any rate was not sufficiently careful not to deviate too far from the original text.

On the concept of time, one finds Mbiti's description of the concept in Africa rather puzzling because the Rev. author was supposedly describing the practice of his own people who he claims to understand! Of course he committed the fallacy of over generalization, i.e. moving from a particular area of experience to general area to cover the whole without giving substantial reasons in justification. By justification here, I do not mean merely providing statistical evidence since the tedium of this, in a philosophical work, can be avoided without any loss to the quality of the work. Rather I mean that Mbiti ought to have explained how what he claims obtains among the Gikuyu and Akamba peoples in East Africa is also true of the Yoruba and the Akan²⁸ of West Africa. We know that the Yoruba do have the concept of distant future time given what they do.²⁹ They also have words³⁰ which are synonymous with the English word 'future' although I argue that the coincidence of synonymy here is beside the point since there is no 'a priori' reason why English language should be the accepted paradigm of the communication of ideas.

So in saying that African concept of time is two-dimensional (page 17) Mbiti fails to fairly represent the true position. Mbiti also suggests that the African concept is cyclical whilst the European concept is linear. That the movement in Africa is

from present (Sasa) to past (Zamani) and back to present and back, etc. etc. Clearly, whereas we could see some excuse for this conclusion, we cannot accept the thesis that this is the only way by which Africans describe their experiences in the traditional environment. There is some sense in which, upon examining what Africans believe, we find this cycle. However even from within the cycle, experiences only become past after they have taken place. In other words, it is 'future' which pushes 'present' into 'past' and so becomes 'present'. Thus if we are able to meaningfully speak of a long past, then 'ipso facto' we must be able to speak significantly of a distant future: for there was a present time when what is now long past was in a distant future. If this line of reasoning is accepted, then it seems to me plausible that even within this so-called cyclical syndrome, there is the possibility of a linear interpretation. But now, what justification can Mbiti possibly have for saying 'since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in Sasa and Zamani'. (page 23) And again '... African peoples have no "belief in progress"' (page 23) 'The people neither plan for the distant future nor "build castles in the air"' (page 23). Experience has shown that people simply could not have survived if they either do not or can not take account of what the future may bring. The Gikuyu and Akamba have survived.

Whilst one, naturally, does not wish to turn what was to have been a mention of Mbiti's unsuccessful effort at philosophizing into a review of his book one finds so much wrong with it that a mere mention will not do justice to one's findings. Now, on page 36, Rev. Mbiti quotes his brother theologian, the Nigerian Rev. Bolaji Idowu as claiming that the Yoruba think of God as 'the Mighty, Immovable Rock that never dies'. Probably in the area of poetry this kind of stuff may be in its element. However, if the concern is for a philosophical system, then Mbiti and Idowu must modify their respective positions. The Yoruba do not believe in the christian God and their deities are never described in this fashion. The arch-deity in the Yoruba world-view is not even considered omnipotent.³¹

Finally, we must turn to what Rev. Mbiti terms African concept of morality. Even here, we are just as baffled as much else in his book. On page 207, the author claims that for the Africans, 'something is evil because it is punished: it is not punished because it is evil.' There is surely an earlier version of this view in the Book of Job.³² It is therefore more an old testament christian idea than an African concept. However, the idea here, I think, is attributable to Professor Evans-Pritchard. In his Nuer Religion Evans-Pritchard explains that the Nuer were more interested in the practical things of

life than in the theoretical matters of metaphysics
such that for them

...the sin lies not so much in the
breach of the interdiction... 33

However, explains Evans-Pritchard, the Nuer do
understand for something to be described as a wrong,
etc., only that a greater emphasis is placed upon the
consequences of wrong doing, i.e. punishment. This
I suggest, is symptomatic of traditional peoples
everywhere.

And in any case, the fact that men everywhere, i.e. in
both traditional and modern societies do put up sanctions
in order to sustain public morality should not be taken
to imply that the notion of evil is an 'a posteriori' one.
In modern states where there exist legal structures which
are maintained by police men, no one ever suggests that
such policemen merely by their presence create morality
unless that person wishes to appear absurd. Any concept
of morality must be established and so held 'a priori',
i.e. before any possible need for sanctions. Since
Africans in the traditional setting are like other
traditional peoples, I find it impossible to accept the
view that African do or did not check the 'rightness' of
a custom by appealing to something extra, i.e. to some
criterion beyond the custom which may be in question.

Therefore it is not immediately clear why, as in the example of the Gikuyu ritual of shaving the hair on the head of children, Rev. Mbiti went beyond what is provided in the original text. However this may be, Mbiti seems to contradict his view herein that for the Africans, morality is not formal when he says later in the same book that morality is formal:

There are customs, laws, regulations and taboos that govern conduct in society. Any breach of the right conduct amounts to a moral evil. We find endless examples of that in African societies.³⁴

Wonders will never end. So after all, there are 'endless examples' of 'customs, laws, regulations and taboos... in African societies. Any breach of (which) amounts to a moral evil.' Since Mbiti has refuted his own thesis that Africans lack an, 'a priori' concept of morality, there ought to be the end of the matter.

We may, I think, now turn our attention to the rather interesting question: How did scholars like Rev. John Mbiti and Fr. Placide Tempels, among others, come to commit these philosophical howlers? My own view is that there are two main reasons for this: First, philosophy as a second-order enterprise is grounded in the reflections upon ideas, views, etc. about man, society and nature. Now, these ideas, views, etc. must be either one's own or properly other people's not imaginary, non-existent world-view as Tempels' work on the Bantu or Mbiti's African two dimensional concept of time which in reality

nobody holds. And secondly, these researchers failed to understand that one's method depends crucially upon the theoretical system which that method is meant to elucidate. Therefore, the methodology which it is appropriate in theological matters may be totally inadequate when applied to a philosophical system: for philosophy is mainly concerned with the justification, in rigorous sense, of our various claims to knowledge, not sanctification as it is all too often the case in religious matters.

Philosophical attempts at justification are clearly crucial to epistemological claims to knowledge. These matters task the philosopher in a way that matters, for example, relating to religious beliefs do not press themselves upon the theologian. To this extent, therefore, the main task of philosophy is that of clearing away the 'rubbish that lies in the way of knowledge'. This is the underlabourer conception of philosophy³⁵ with which philosophers like Hume, Locke, Ayer, Flew, among other distinguished philosophers, have concerned themselves unreletingly. How much success comes one's way depends crucially upon one's method.

III. THE QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY

1. Empirical Research and Philosophical Analysis

Although we do in the main rely upon analysis to show what it makes sense to say in philosophy, the question also of empirical research cannot be ruled out of court. For, if we want to elicit from a culture a communal world-view (folk philosophy) or indeed from certain individuals their own personal ratiocinative ideas (second-order philosophy) it is more appropriate to embark upon an empirical research in order to establish these ideas, views and so forth. Now, the view that this kind of work can be attempted through a process of armchair theorising as the work of Sir Edward B. Tylor³⁶ bears testimony, is fraught with all manner of danger of misunderstanding and misrepresentation. And yet, we are not thereby suggesting that empirical investigation can replace philosophical analysis. Our claim is the strong claim that in a research such as the one we are engaged in here, empirical inquiry is very necessary as a supplementary method of philosophical investigation.

There are two paradigmatic empirical research methods which have, in recent past, been employed in Africa to depict and explicate philosophy: (1) as a second-order activity (H. Odera Oruka's 'Sagacity in African Philosophy', 1982); and (2) as a traditional/folk, communal world-view (M. Griaule's Conversations with

Ogotemmeli, 1965). The former being an example of a philosophical work whilst the latter, ethnological.

Now, from a methodological point of view, what generally distinguishes a research in philosophy from other types of research such as sociology or ethnology lies in what fundamentally divides philosophy from other disciplines in the social sciences: philosophy is not concerned with a cosy unanimity of any number of people thus not a matter of 'counting noses'. For, philosophy as a talk about talk, i.e. second-order enterprise is, given its nature, a personal or individualist activity. It does not for this reason depend upon consensus or agreement. So then, as practitioners of philosophy at the second-order level, we intend to adopt the style of Odera Oruka and shall therefore be much concerned with the ideas and thoughts of individuals rather than a communal system which, for example, is the result of Griaule's Conversations with Ogotemmeli.

We are thus faced with two questions: First, what are the factors which determine our selection of an individual? And secondly, since we have decided to employ the Socratic 'question and answer' method of interrogation, what sort of questions would elicit from the individual the kind of ideas and views which are of philosophical interest?

As to the first question, the selected individual must be a sage (wiseman) who has distanced himself from the communal ideas and beliefs of his people in order to exude a personal philosophy. In other words, he must be a philosophic-sage, i.e., a wiseman who is also a philosopher. This is very important because not all sages (wisemen) are philosophers - there are folk-sages, like Ogotemmel, who are versed in the communal ideas of their people.

And conversely, not all philosophers are wisemen - there are non-sagacious philosophers, i.e. individuals who are philosophers 'per se'. Let us take two examples of this phenomenon for illustration purposes: one from the recent history of Western Philosophy and the other from the contemporary history of African Philosophy.

The attitude of Ludwig Wittgenstein to his work presents us with a good example of a philosopher who was not gifted, unlike Immanuel Kant, with sagacity. Now, when we consider a matter from a logical point of view, we are forced into the conclusion that two inconsistencies cannot both be right. However, when two contradictory ideas are imputed to the same person, as we have in the case of Wittgenstein, we find that both may indeed be true. We note that in recent times, attempts have been made to investigate the notoriously persistent misconceptions of the ways in which language works. And yet, although Wittgenstein was himself an outstanding

contributor to this work of investigation and clarification, he concluded rather paradoxically that the outcome is nil! For, in the judgement of the philosopher, it 'leaves everything as it is'. Wittgenstein thus contradicts the result of his own labours.

The late Luo, Muganda Okwako is another example of a philosopher who failed to exhibit much wisdom in his philosophizing. He was very aggressively individualistic and adduced substantial arguments, even if wrongheaded, for his position. Okwako extolled what to him were European virtues and prowess as against the 'lazy non-inventive' habit of the African. Even when he refused to discuss the question of death, he offered the 'reason' that such discussion would hasten his demise! We shall reserve for another time a more detailed work on philosophers of the type of Okwako, for in the present work, our concern is centred around those philosophers only who are also sagacious. We shall therefore proceed by a process of elimination through first seeking out those individuals who are sages and then rationally separating the folk-sages from the philosophic-sages. Our task then is to concentrate upon a dialogue with the latter with a view to extracting and helping to explicate those ideas within their thoughts on various subjects which we consider worthy of philosophic attention.

Now to the second question: how do we, acting the part of philosophic 'provocateur', elicit the relevant

ideas from the sage, In his research into the thoughts of some Kenya sages, Professor Odera Oruka followed certain guidelines which he had drawn up in form of questions appended to such topics as:

1. God and Religion.
2. The Concept of Time
3. Society and Familyhood.
4. Communalism and Equality.
5. Law and Punishment.
6. Man and the Concept of Rationality.
7. Freedom of the Will and Determinism.
8. On Man and Woman.
9. Races and Tribes.
10. Life and Death.
11. Culture and Education.
12. Witchcraft and Medicine.

Since these topics cover a substantially wide area of philosophy, we shall adopt them in the present work.

The researches of Professor Odera Oruka strongly suggest, and our present efforts confirm, the existence of critical independent traditional African thinkers whose ideas are fashioned through the application of reason in a systematic way and also on certain occasions exhibiting flashes of intuition. The fact that much of what has transpired in traditional Africa until recently has been oral makes necessary the question as to what extent such testimonies as are available represent reality. Our investigations will be fashioned in a way such that this problem of oral culture is not overlooked.

Although it is our wish not to limit our enquiry to those sages only who are free from the influence of modern Westernized education - there are some literate sages - as a first step, our efforts will be concentrated upon eliciting from those sages who because they belong to an oral culture, were not able, by themselves to set down their thoughts in writing. This kind of research is therefore all the more urgent because many of these sages living in traditional environment are old and so may soon die out.

2. Ratiocinative Thought in an Oral Culture.

We now come to the question with respect to how we bring our research method to bear upon an oral culture. Since what is required of us as professional philosophers is the 'discovery' of the philosophic sages who hitherto were unknown and so unrecognised, it will not matter that certain of the 'discovered' sages did not always express their ideas in a systematic way. For, it is our duty to carry out such reconstructions as are necessary in order to build the fragments and aphorisms which form the bulk of the thoughts of these sages into philosophical systems. Although our method is akin to that of Socrates, it is different in the sense that we do not at any point attempt to lead the sage to a particular conclusion. For this reason, we are entitled, I think, to claim that any views which the sage expresses are entirely his own. Our method is therefore one which allows the sage the role of a principal actor and this, I believe, is indicative.

3. Non-technical Philosophy: The paradigm case of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Now, when we take all the available evidence of philosophy in traditional Africa, we find both the poetic (non-technical) as well as the systematic (technical) philosophising. For, what we have been able to glean from the fragments and aphorisms extracted from the thoughts of African philosophic sages amount to, not only the use of reason in a systematic fashion; but also flashes of intuition which are not often systematic analysis of ideas. Although these fragments do not form complete systems, 'qua' systems, they are nevertheless acceptable for the reason that they are philosophical in orientation, i.e. second-order and rigorous in form.

So then, our view that the not so systematic flashes of intuition are acceptable philosophical material is warranted because we are entitled, I argue, to rely upon that perfectly respectable pedigree which we find in Nietzsche. He had argued in favour of what he termed frenzied spontaneous type of philosophy (Dionysian) as opposed to the measured, orderly type of philosophy (Apollinian) insisting upon the superiority of the former. Nietzsche's writings lack the systematic spectre which is characteristic of philosophical works. Yet, no one but the eccentric in the extreme would deny

that Nietzsche was a philosopher. We are not, however, in support of Nietzsche's claim that his favoured poetic type of philosophy is superior to the more systematic, technical philosophy. Our position is simply that the building of inferences, systems and so forth is not the only way of doing philosophy - Philosophy is philosophy not only when it is logically (rationally) attractive - but also when it is challenging in any form to those who dare to think.

Now, in his thesis that we ought to view science through art and art through life, Nietzsche, like David Hume before him, was suggesting that reason is or ought to be the slave of passion. He also held the pragmatic theory of truth in which the claim is made that 'p. is true and q. is false if p. works and q. does not'. Now, in the Nachlass (Unpublished Notes), Nietzsche argued a rather interesting 'one-way traffic thesis' or asymmetry in the relation between pain and pleasure: 'There are cases' the philosopher showed, 'where a kind of pleasure is determined by a rapid sequence of little pain-excitations. ...as by sexual tickling as in the act of coition, where we see pain as an active ingredient of pleasure.' Thus we may get pleasure through pain but not conversely. Professor Nietzsche also held that in matters epistemological, it is more prudent to be sceptical because, for example, the commonsense view that our perceptions resemble their causes is false or at any rate,

unjustified and misleading. As we have already mentioned,³⁸ Bertrand Russell helped to propagate a similar view in his William James' Lectures of 1940.

So then, our ascription of 'poetic' rather than 'technical' philosophy to certain of the philosophizing of African philosophic sages is not to be taken as denigration of this aspect of their contribution. It is simply a way and means of showing or expressing the fact that some of the material which we are presenting have been 'assembled' rather than 'composed' because the originators sometimes philosophized in the Nietzschean style. It is interesting, I think, in a way to note that the early Greek culture, given the fact that the Greeks of this period were much concerned with poetry and leisure, promoted 'theoria' as against 'techne'. 'Theoria' was equated with philosophy. It was not until the Seventh Century B.C. that philosophy in the technical sense of a second-order enterprise, i.e., reflective analysis of concepts, and so forth, began with the efforts of Thales. The situation in which we find ourselves in contemporary Africa is certainly much more advanced than that of the Greek period of 'poetry and leisure' for Africans already employ the use of reason in a systematic, rigorous manner. It is our duty as professional philosophers to harmonize the material which this environment presents into coherent philosophical systems.

In chapter four, I present the reconstructed philosophies of the selected Kenya sages.

NOTES

1. P.O. Bodunrin, 'The Question of African Philosophy', in Philosophy, 56, 1981
2. B. Hallen and J.O. Sodipo, 'An African Epistemology: The Knowledge - Belief Distinction and Yoruba Thought', University of Ife, February, 1981, paper presented to the Nigerian Philosophical Association Conference, Ibadan, 15-19 February, 1981.
3. H. Odera Oruka, 'Sagacity in African Philosophy', in International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. 4. Issue No. 92, December, 1983
4. Ibidem.
5. M. Griaule, Conversations with Ogotemmeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas. London: Oxford University Press, 1975
6. M. Griaule, Conversations with Ogotemmeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas.
Op. cit., page XVI.
7. B. Hallen and J.O. Sodipo, 'An African Epistemology: The knowledge - Belief Distinction and Yoruba Thought', op. cit., page 1.
8. P.O. Bodunrin, 'The Question of African Philosophy', op. cit., page 168.

9. See H. Odera Oruka, 'Mythologies as African Philosophy',
op. cit.
10. P. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy. Paris: Presence Africaine,
1969, pages 49ff., especially page 51.
11. M. d Douglas, Purity and Danger. London: Routledge
and Kegan Paul, 1969, page 93.
12. Okot p'Bitek, Africa's Cultural Revolution.
Nairobi: MacMillan, 1973, see pages 58-58
13. P. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy. Op. cit., page 21
14. Quoted in J.L. Hymans, Leopold Sedar Senghor -
An Intellectual Biography. Edinburgh: University
Press, 1967, page. 209
15. P. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy. op. cit., page 41.
16. Ibidem.
17. Ibidem.
18. P. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, op. cit., pages
41 - 42
19. P. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, op. cit.,
20. See R.G. Harris' paper, 'Cool, Sober and Methodical',
in Transition, 15, 1964 where Mr. Harris tried
unsuccessfully in my opinion, to explain away the
defects in Fr. Tempels' work by suggesting, among
other things, that whereas scientific enquiries
demand methodical approach, anything, absolutely
anything is permitted in metaphysical investigations.
Clearly, Mr. Harris fails to understand the distinction
between science and philosophy as we have endeavoured

to explain it above. This cleavage can not be taken to mean that philosophy permits non-sense.

21. See Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship, Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970, chapters 10 and 11.
22. See H. Odera Oruka, 'Mythology, Philosophy and Science', op. cit.
23. J. S. Mbiti, African religions and philosophy, London: Heinemann, 1975, page XII
24. P.J. Hountondji, African Philosophy - Myth and Reality, op. cit., page 60.
25. R. Dahrendorf, Essays in the Theory of Society. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, page 44.
26. See Prof. Ali Mazrui's 'Epilogue' in Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship, op. cit., page 126
27. J. Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1982, page 263.
28. K. Gyekye, 'Review of John Mbiti's African Religions and Philosophy', in Second-Order, Vol.IV, No.1, January, 1975.
29. The profession of divination is a highly respected one in Yoruba land. When a baby is given a name,

a prayer is said that the baby may grow old and have its own children. In other words, people do look forward to a time, a future time of about sixteen years, when the child becomes old enough to raise a family of its own.

30. The Yoruba have and do employ words like 'Odigbere', 'Odi-arinako' which words refer to infinite future. Both words are usually used on the occasion of the death of a close relation or friend suggesting that the living and the dead shall one day in an indeterminate future meet again. They also have such names as 'Ola-itan' (prosperity is for ever) and 'Aim'asiko' (our ignorance of the future).
31. See W. Abimbola, 'La Notion de Personne en Afrique Noire'. (The Yoruba Concept of Human Personality), paper No.544 presented to the International Colloquium of the National Centre for Scientific Research, Paris, 1971.
32. The 'Book of Job' in the Bible has it that Job in his afflictions refused to accept the old traditional view that suffering is punishment for sins.
33. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, page 189.
34. J.S. Mbiti, African religions and Philosophy. op. cit., page 213.

35. See P. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science.

London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, pages 3-7.

36. For classic example of this kind of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, see E.B. Tylor, Primitive Culture, London, 1871.

37. A.N. Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas,
Section 3, 'Method and Theory'. New York:
The MacMillan Co., 1933.

38. See note 1 under chapter one above.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAGACITY IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Some Kenya Paradigm Cases

Introduction

Now, the methodology adopted in the collection of the data in this Study is the Socratic maieutic 'question and answer' approach in which the professional philosopher acts the part of a 'philosophic provocateur'. The philosopher here provokes the sage in order to elicit from him his own ratiocinative thoughts and ideas about concepts, problems and so forth. The philosopher does not however permit himself to dominate the conversation and even more importantly, is very clearly disposed to allow the arguments of the sage to influence his own views and opinions.

Of the sages with whom discussions were held, three were finally selected for inclusion in this work. These are Paul Mbuya, Oruka Ranginya and Nyandara Oigara. Both Mbuya and Ranginya hail from the Luo community and conversations with them were conducted by Professor H.O. Oruka. Oigara is a Kisii and the conversation with him was conducted by me.

Now, in his conversations with Mbuya and Ranginya, Prof. Oruka used the Luo language, he being a Luo himself. It was therefore considered necessary to use the services of Mr. Samuel Oluoch, a final year philosophy student here

at the University of Nairobi, in the transcription of the recorded conversations first into Luo language and then into English. This transcription was done under my supervision.

In my conversation with Oigara, I used the services of Mr. Charles Ondimu Nyandara, a bank official and son of the sage: for Oigara speaks only Kisii and I English.

I now present my reconstructions of the reasonings of the three sages indicating the questions asked of them thus: 'Q'.

A. FRAGMENTS AND APHORISMS FROM THE THOUGHTS OF PAUL MBUYA

I. THE LUO LINEAR CONCEPT OF TIME

Q. Did the Luo talk of things which happened, say, one hundred years ago?

1. In Dholuo 'Luo language', time is known as 'kinde'. The Luo have always had quite a lot to say about those things which happened long ago by using specific events to mark out or pin point the location of such events on the time-continuum. 'Ex hypothesi', a person may refer to a famine which had taken place as a result of drought. That would be quite a story. Another example which could be given is the case of a man who went about killing people at will - that legendary Luanda Magere from Kisumu. Herein lie some examples of references made to past occurrences which could be, as indeed they are, used as points of reference on the time - continuum. These are then related to events which are meant to be dated.

2. This method of dating events is necessarily approximate since those events which are used as paradigms are located in period blocks. We may call this the psychological method of dating events as opposed to the modern mechanical method in which people rely on the use of mechanical devices such as clocks, watches and so forth. The dholuo word for a past event is 'chon' which in Kiswahili is 'zamani'. For present,

current events, the Dholuo word is 'tinde' and the Kiswahili word is 'sasa'.

- Q. Did people also talk of things which will take place, say, twenty years hence which events the English call 'future'?
3. Now, with respect to the word future, the Luo speak of 'gi ma nobi' for, I think there is no one single word which exactly corresponds to the English 'future'. This future may be definite where people might have some idea when they expect an event to take place. On the other hand, it may be indefinite as may be illustrated with the activities of 'prophets' and what nots foretelling events which they expect to take place in a future which it is not possible to ascertain at the time of prophecy.
4. 'Prophets', Johulo in Dholuo, for example, prophesied the coming of Europeans to Luo land long before the time of my own generation and even before our own fathers were born. These diviners also foresaw a famine which they claimed, before the event, would force people to eat animal skins. This caused quite a stir at the time because animal skin was used only for decoration and also as items for clothing. The history of the Luo confirms the coming to pass of this event.

5. Now, the Luo word chieng is neutral for it is not restricted to any particular tense. Therefore, it can be used to refer to a past or future event depending upon the context of its use in a sentence. There has quite often arisen a confusion in its use when it is taken as synonymous with the phrase 'gi ma nobi' which means: future or more fully, that event which will come to pass at a future date. Clearly, therefore, the word and the phrase cognitively mean and so are used to stand for different situations: for, whereas 'gi ma nobi' means future; 'chieng' could properly be taken to illustrate an event which has occurred (past) or one which is yet to take place (future).

II. RELIGION AND THE CONCEPT OF GOD

- Q. What do you think God is? What is religion and why do you think people believe in God?
6. Long ago, there were no demoninations or factions in matters of religion. The Luo regarded 'Nyasaye' (God) as omnipresent. People turned to Him for help in all manner of ways. For example, the person going to war would appeal to 'Nyasaye' to help defeat his enemy. Where he was victorious, he concluded that it was all due to the favourable disposition of 'Nyasaye'. The interesting thing here is that the vanquished also expected the help of the same

'Nyasaye'. Now, when a patient recovered from his illness he acknowledged the help of 'Nyasaye'. He believed also that there was in addition an element of luck but that it was 'Nyasaye' who brought the luck his way.

7. People acknowledged 'Nyasaye' and so when they rose in the morning, they looked at 'wang chieng' (the face of the sun) for God was thought to reside there as one might expect an occupant of a house. The sun was therefore believed to be capable of acting the role of an intermediary between people and God. Thus people showed the palms of their hands to the face of the sun in supplication. Now as the sun sets in the west, people would look directly at it saying 'set well so that no evil thing befalls us'. During this period, religion was not fragmented and so there were no denominations or factions. People recognized one 'Nyasaye' which in my opinion is the correct attitude.

Q. The Europeans brought the concept of dini (denominations). Do you think their God and Luo God is the same God?

8. It was the coming of the European missionaries which introduced the element of fragmentation into religion. Notwithstanding, the European concept of God and our own concept is basically the same for there is only one God if there is God and there is God. Although,

the Luo recognized one 'Nyasaye', they were wrong to think that 'their' God (Nyasaye) is different from the God of the Europeans. Thus we had, as a result of this incoherent thinking among the Luo, a situation in which other tribes thought that they too had their 'own' God. This is totally mistaken. I can demonstrate this quite simply by pointing at the rather pedestrian fact that nature is uniform. The existence of many gods would have resulted in 'pulling' the universe in different directions! This takes care of any possibility of there existing a pantheon of gods.

- Q. Is it correct that the 'jodolo' used witchcraft to kill people?
9. Now there were the 'jodolo' who were the people responsible for offering sacrifices. These holy people were thought to know where God dwelt. However, some wrongly thought that the 'jodolo' also practised witchcraft. They were in fact God-fearing people who offered sacrifice and prayers on behalf of supplicants. For example, if rain failed, then the 'jodolo' would be invited to offer prayers and sacrifice to 'Nyasaye' so that there would be rain.
10. Among the Luo of long ago, those who recognized and feared God were good people. However, there were the 'jajuok' who did evil things. Those who feared God and obeyed the elders prospered. The fear of God

and the respect of elders were linked since elders in the earthly hierarchy represented God who was thought to be at the head of the heavenly hierarchy. From this point of view of morality, belief in God served a purpose, a good positive end.

11. But were the 'jajuok' truly powerful? I think not. They got their reputation and so their power from the fact of the death of their enemies who may have died from 'fear' when threatened with death. The 'jajuok' used this psychological ploy to get rid of their enemies. So in some cases where the death of a person may well have been due to disease of some sort or other, the 'jajuok' would say: 'I told him he would "see" when he offended me'. So people came to fear them.
12. However, I do not think that they had real power. It was only fear which killed those who died as a result of the threats from the 'jajuok'. Now if a person who it was thought had power to kill people wagged his finger at you, is it surprising that his 'reputation' would help to instil a psychological fear in you? But I do not think they had real power. Unless somebody manages to poison his enemy there ought not be any fear of death. Poisoning or physical attack are the only ways by which a person could be killed. Clearly therefore some people die through being instilled with the fear of death.

III. THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Q. How were the young people educated before the Europeans arrived here in Kenya?

13. There are two types of Education: formal and informal. Education has always been considered a very important aspect of the upbringing of a child by the Luo. This teaching and tests were extremely rigorous. These were conducted and supervised by elders considered wise by the community. The boys were usually divided into groups. One group may be given instructions on the art of fighting. Here, such skills as the use of spear and shield might be imparted. There were different other types of training. It is important to note that the people in charge of these exercises were men and women who had made their mark on the community. They were usually the wisest - the best in the village. It is not unlike the situation today when only the people specially trained are allowed to handle the education of the youth.

14. The only difference lies in the fact that whereas in modern times, teachers are required to go to a place specifically appointed for the purpose of passing instructions or teaching (school); in the old days, it was not so. There would, for example, be a wise man living in South Nyanza and all the young people in his area as well as neighbouring communities would be required to go to him for instructions.

It was a distinct quality in these elders that they were often very ready to acknowledge their limitations. So, whenever they felt unable to help or cope, they would suggest the name of another wise person to whom they were willing to defer.

15. Unfortunately, these men and women of quality are now very few remaining. They are dying off. And the people of the younger generation are showing interest only in such things as stories and the history of Europeans in Africa and like things instead of the roots of their culture. So the traditional wisdom is not, or at any rate does not seem to be, continuing. The younger people, the youth of today in their ignorance seem to look down upon the traditions of their fathers. I think something ought to be done to rekindle interest in the study of the traditional life of our people.

Q. We hear so much about people who were great because they fought in wars, are people remembered for their intelligence?

16. Now as to greatness, it is wrong, I believe, to think that the famous Luo people attained their greatness only because they fought in wars. In this context one always hears of a name like Luanda Magere and justly. But there are also those others who are remembered for their intelligence, and erudition.

17. There were people like Gor, a very clever man. And also Maina son of Mbuya. Gor was a very famous man who even had a football club named after him. He certainly knew the ways of the world. He was very clever. It was believed that he had the capacity to change himself into many things. But people were wrong because Gor himself told me that he never changed into anything. When he was going into enemy territory, he would paint himself liberally with dust. He thus looked like a mad man. He was very clever. He was a master of disguise and this in my opinion, explains why he was able to roam freely in enemy territory without being recognised. Sometimes of course, he would carry many odd things about his person. He was no doubt a very versatile individual.

Q. Do you think you are one of today's wise men? Are you a wise man?

18. People have often asked me: 'Mzee Mbuya, are you a wise man?' to which I always answered: 'No'. I do not think I am wise for there are many people who are wiser than I am. It is only that I do not know them! But I see young people coming to me. One man may come to me saying: 'I have some problems because I married without a go-between'. Young women also come seeking my advice. One may say: 'I am in difficulty because I married the wrong man.

What am I to do?'. On the whole, I have in this respect found women more intelligent than men for they are more inclined to follow useful advice.

IV. MAN AND WOMAN: BOTH PLAY EQUALLY IMPORTANT ROLES IN SOCIETY.

Q. Do you think that man and woman should be considered equals?

19. There is a popular Luo belief that the man is the owner and master of the homestead: The whole homestead! But I think this belief is wrong. For, when we come to the house, the woman is in control there. In the house, the man can only ask for things. He cannot do as he pleases without any restraint. However, the woman too cannot do anything without asking her husband. Thus, husband and wife help each other. Where peace is desired, each person tries not to overstep the boundary which common-sense determines in relationships.

20. However on the question of equality of the sexes in political and social terms, I personally think that unnecessary problems may be created if not carefully handled. For, women still need many more years before reaching the level of their men folk. It is only after many more years of education and orientation that this equality will come. It ought not be forced. But if people take it hastily, the result will be problems: avoidable problems. Education will in time help to

redress this imbalance since men and women are inherently equal. It is opportunity, or lack of it which cause inequality.

21. So given the view that man and woman are inherently equal, we see that a woman can be more intelligent than a man just as a man can also be more intelligent than a woman.
22. Of course, there is a tradition in which women are portrayed and indeed come to see themselves as inferior. This, in my opinion, is due to nothing other than laziness on the part of women. This type of woman goes about with a chip on her shoulder saying: 'I am only a woman, Why are you not treating me gently and favourably?' That a person happens to be a woman is not, by itself, a justification for her getting a favourable treatment.
23. On the other hand, men generally do not like betraying the fact, at any rate in public, that there are times when their women do surpass them in matters with respect to the knowledge of certain things. However, when the husband and wife are in the privacy of their home, one may at times find the woman not only matching but exceeding her husband's prowess in many ways. This is neither unusual nor extra-ordinary.

V. ON THE IDEA OF COMMUNALISM

Q. What do you think of the old Luo idea of communalism?

24. Now the sense in which we may justly say that the Luo in the traditional setting practised communalism is not one in which people generously shared property or wealth. Their idea of communalism is I think, of a co-operative nature. For example, where one person had cattle, everybody 'ipso facto' had cattle. For, the owner of the cattle would distribute his cattle among people who did not have cattle so that the less well-off people may take care of them. However, the cattle was never completely given away. The poor were only given temporary charge of these animals by their better-off neighbours. For example, the cattle owner may give one poor man four cows, another five cows and so on to look after. The result is that everybody had cows to look after and so milk to drink.
25. Where a person wants to get married but did not have such things as cows, etc., other people would 'chip in'. One person might contribute a calf whilst another a bull and so forth. Thus with the co-operative help of neighbours and relatives a man who otherwise would have been in difficulty became able to cope with the expenses of getting married. And when this person who himself was helped became able, he too felt obliged to help

others. Help is thus spread throughout the community and everybody felt a sense of belonging. This is different from the 'political' communalism we hear so much about these days.

26. In a famine situation, no one was allowed or left to starve. Here the communal spirit comes into its own. A wealthy man would give to the poor. He may feel able to give a basket of grains to one man, two baskets to another according to the needs of these individuals. Thus everyone had something to eat. It was considered anti-social if any one kept things to himself alone. But then, there was also the extended family system which made people generally feel that they all belonged to one family; it turned mere neighbours into relations of a sort.
27. A person who brews beer would be happier when there are others to share it with him. On the other hand, a person may prepare food and invite others to share it with him. That is what used to happen. No person was allowed to become destitute. Where in a village, and this was extremely rare, a person died of hunger, the people of that village were made laughing stock by people of the neighbouring villages because it was considered a very shameful thing for a person to be left to starve to death.

Q. Do you think this spirit exists today?

28. This communal spirit is sadly being allowed to die out through the importation of foreign ideas and process of modernization. A means ought to be found whereby what is good in our past is accommodated in things new and modern.

Q. Given the nature of things today, do you think that communalism can go on?

29. As I have tried to explain, the introduction of modern way of life is gradually bringing to an end this communal spirit. It is much to be regretted that everybody is now so obsessed with his person that he does not show much interest in what else is going on around him. The order of the day is now one in which individuals say: 'I want a car, a large house, and so forth; therefore in order to be able to afford all these things, I must concentrate all my efforts only upon my own person'. Thus the very laudable communal spirit is gradually giving way to the modern aggressive individualism. But are we tending or at any rate likely to become like the Europeans? I do not know.

Q. Do you think that all peoples are born equal or are there some races born with less intelligence?

30. Now it must be understood that people are born with certain differences which must be acknowledged.

Even in a communist society, there are still people who have more strength than others. There are those who may, for example, have enough strength to be capable of fighting an animal as strong as a lion. There are those who can have so much food by sheer hard work. Others still are good only at rearing animals, and so forth. Thus we see that people are not equal in every respect.

31. However, it is my opinion that because a person is born with superior powers is all the more reason why that person ought to place his extra or superior powers at the service of his less well off neighbours. Given his superior powers, he can produce more food to feed others so that all may live together in happiness otherwise the poor may develop jealousy of, or even hatred for, the more fortunate.

Q. What is the nature of the equality which existed in the communal environment?

32. The fact that I have expressed the view that people ought to continue to live together helping one another as in the old days is not to be taken to entail the possible conclusion that there still will not be those who, for example, have more power and wealth. Even if all lived equally, but there still will exist that man, I mean the more enterprising one, who would have a lot of animals. These animals

are his and must remain his. The fact that he helps to feed other people only reinforces this position. For, to say that there was equality in the communal environment simply because no one was allowed to become destitute is totally unwarranted. It is in fact false. As I explained above, equality is not the reason for communalism in Africa.

IV. MAN IS SUPERIOR TO ANIMAL

Q. What are the main differences between man and animal?

33. Now when we consider man in relation to animal, we find that there are differences: man is superior to the animal. For although both have life in thought and behaviour, man provides for the future whereas the animal does not. We also find that man is not really afraid of animals even though some animals can be very fierce. For, man has intellect which animals lack. And if an animal gets the scent of man, it must run away. Again man is both a thinking (rational) and a social being. This he manifests through the use of his intellect.

VII. THERE IS A CLEAVAGE BETWEEN FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS

Q. What do you think is the significance of 'thuolo' (freedom)?

34. 'Thuolo' (Freedom) means simply to be able to act as one pleases. For example, a person who is bonded, as

a slave is, may be released from the bondage. Upon release, that person becomes a freeman. He is free. Or say a person fought a battle or did other things to liberate himself: if he is successful, then he becomes a freeman. He becomes free to will whatever he wishes. This is 'thuolo'.

35. Secondly, an unmarried girl living at home with her parents is not in the 'thuolo' sense free because there are a number of things which she cannot do. For example, she is forbidden from looking into her mother's pot or entering her parents' bedroom, and so forth. However, when she is married and has her own home, then she can do as she pleases. She is free. But this 'thuolo' is limited because she still has her husband, etc., etc. Long ago, before the Europeans first came to Kenya, people thought that we were free. But I do not think that we were a free people. Even now that we have our independence, this nominal independence, how free are we really?
36. If we consider the matter carefully we find that we do not have freedom. Are we still not as we were under the Europeans? Government of the pre-independence period hindered people from doing as they pleased and government today still hinders people from attaining freedom to do as they please. People are forcibly restrained from

doing so many things which they otherwise would have liked to do. When people harvest their grains, the government does not allow them to do as they please with it. This is not freedom.

Q. Do people generally lack freedom or do you think there are only a few who enjoy freedom!

37. Some people do have more freedom, relatively than others. People who are leaders in government for example, the President, have more freedom. But again when one thinks carefully about the matter one finds that even the President, as powerful as he is, is himself not free to do those things the cabinet would not have him do. He too is therefore restricted in a sense. Thus there is no person who can be said to be completely free such that he could do anything without any restraint. Therefore there is no complete freedom. All our actions are, at any rate to some extent, the wishes of other people. And I mean this in a general, universal sense.

38. Now let us consider this question: 'Is the man who is happy not happy on the account that nobody interferes with him in his actions?'. The answer to this question is 'No' for there is a clear distinction between freedom and happiness.

Q. What ought a person do who wants freedom?

39. If a person works hard and acquires a lot of animals and wealth generally so that he does not depend

upon anybody, then that person is free. A person cannot be free if he works for and so depends upon another person. Neither can a person be free merely by the fact that he is wealthy for he still needs depend upon the activities of others, for example, his workers in the production of his wealth. And we have not mentioned the constraint placed upon all individuals by governments. So then, even if a person has a lot of wealth, if this person is restrained or affected in his actions by the will of others, then the best he is entitled to claim is happiness not freedom. Therefore no one has complete freedom.

VIII. ON LAW AND PUNISHMENT

Q. Did the Luo have their own system of law and punishment long ago?

40. Before the coming of Europeans, the Luo had their own system of law and punishment. Thus there were law courts of a sort. A court was described as 'Kar ng'ado bura' (a place of passing judgement). Here, elders sat in judgement but only those elders who were known to be the wisest, not just anybody.

41. Now, where a person was convicted of an offence, he was punished but not executed however serious the offence even in cases of murder. The Luo did not approve of killing people except in war. This

explains why those found guilty of capital offence were never sentenced to death. It was considered, also, not proper that a grown up man should be whipped. However, any wrongdoer who had committed a serious offence was banished from the community. In such circumstances, he was exiled to a place which is far away from his home. This was considered a drastic enough punishment reserved only for very serious offences. A man who had transgressed might be cursed as a punishment. This class of offenders was allowed to remain within the community having been reduced to the level of feeble-minded idiots.

42. Another type of punishment was that of administration of a drug which made such offenders become very stupid. The drug could also make a person very ill for a considerably long period of time. This would give the elders the opportunity of reforming such offender and if reformed, an antidote was administered so that the person became his normal self again.

Q. What of the confiscation of an offender's property?

43. Now, where a person committed murder, his property was confiscated as punishment. The confiscated property was then turned over to the family of the murdered person in compensation. If, for

example, the murdered person were a married man and his wife were to decide to remarry and bear a child in the name of the deceased husband, then ten cows were confiscated. In the alternative, the murderer was made to pay whatever dowry was necessary.

IX. PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RACES AND TRIBES MUST
LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE

Q. Do you think the world would have been better if there were only one race?

44. There are different types of people in the world and so there are different races on the macro-level; and tribes on the micro-level. This is undoubtedly a fact. Any tribe or race which attempts to wipe out other tribes or races such that only one tribe or race remains is embarking upon an exercise in futility. The Luo used to think albeit wrongly, that they could wipe out other tribes or at any rate subjugate them because they believed in the supremacy of their

tribe. Clearly this is a recipe for trouble. The Luo should therefore learn to understand the other tribes so that all live together in harmony. For, it is not possible, I think, for the Luo, Kisii, Kikuyu, Kamba and other tribes each to do away with their traditions. The differences will remain and so must be accommodated.

Q. What do you think accounts for the fighting among people of different tribes and races?

45. There is fighting and bad feelings among people of different tribes and even among peoples of different races. This situation is likely to continue until people turn their attention to the elimination of the cause of war rather than the effects as is all too often the case at present. Wars are caused by the avarice and greed of men. Not only greed for power.

Q. What do you think brings about this bad feeling?

46. Now a race or tribe might consider itself so strong such that other races or tribes cannot equal it. Such race or tribe would therefore not tolerate any act which it considers a disrespect from an 'inferior' race or tribe. This is the germ of the dangerous idea that weaker races or tribes are ripe for plunder. My

own view is that this idea has an affinity with the belief that might is right, i.e., that 'right' is always subordinate to 'might'. Such are the germs which cause wars.

Q. It has been claimed that some races have superior intellectual powers. Do you think there is any justification for this claim?

47. When a race is wealthy, there is an almost invariable tendency for it to claim superiority. However, I do not think that any particular people or race or tribe was created by God to be superior. Wealth can be acquired by any people. Thus, all races have, inherently, equal power. This power is nevertheless put to use in different ways and hence the manifest differences in development.

48. The intelligence which the Europeans present is the intelligence God prophesied would come into the world in the present phase of world history. However, this intelligence is not the property of any one people. God said intelligence would come into the world. The Europeans themselves gained some of their knowledge or intelligence from other races as we are now gaining much knowledge from them. We are, in time, likely to equal the Europeans in achievement. We may even surpass them. They were not born with more intelligence

than other people. Even today there are people in Europe who lack the intelligence which we see in some Europeans. Let us therefore define an intelligent race as a race which has used its acquired intelligence wisely. In this sense, 'knowledge' has an affinity with 'intelligence'.

49. Of course, the foregoing are my own views which are not representative of the general Luo belief system. Long ago, the Luo believed no other tribe was superior to it. They thought they were the greatest. They used to boast in this way. They claimed that the Luo were second only to the Europeans and therefore were the 'wazungu wa Kisumu' - Europeans of Kisumu, which town they affectionately described as their 'London'.

50. In those days, the Luo were not only warriors and fighters, but also very learned and intelligent people. They were thus able to work on European farms and also serve as the servants of the Europeans. They were to be found everywhere. The Luo were in ascendancy mainly, I think, because the other tribes did not think of engaging in these multifarious activities. As a result, the Luo wrongly thought they were superior to others.

X. ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

- Without death, life would have little or no significance and yet death is not the anti-thesis of life but its climax -

Q. What are your own views about life and death?

51. The question of 'life and death' is fundamentally a puzzling one. It is therefore a matter which is not easy to understand. Life was given by God. After that, there is death. At death life is lost. And yet the Luo did not accept the idea that a dead man was lost. Their belief was that a dead person was only asleep and was alive in another place. Thus the deceased was sent on an errand to other person(s) who had preceded him to the great beyond. The Luo believed that, a dead man because he had shed his earthly body had thereby acquired the capacity to see and communicate with others in the world of spirits. Thus if a person who was a good person died people were happy on account of the fact that the deceased had the capacity to affect the spirit world for good.

Q. How does making the spirit world better affect the living world?

52. This happiness on the occasion of the death of a good person stems from the belief that the deceased would join in the struggle against those

evil spirits which were thought to be waging a terrorising and haunting war against the living from the spirit world. Where the haunting went on unabated, further appeals were made to the deceased for more help. For the Luo, therefore, upon death, the spirit went to another place thus those still alive could not see him. Only the body which when alive accommodated the departed spirit, was buried. It was thought that bodies became empty shells upon death.

Q. Did people believe the dead can hear them?

53. The Luo believe the deceased could hear their cries for help. I think the Luo were right here because the dead heard their supplication. An appeal to the dead person was usually made from his grave side.

54. It appears the Europeans and even the Jews believed in the power of the spirit of the dead to affect the process here on earth. I strongly believe the Luo lived with the Jews a long time ago. The Luo and the Jews did live together. For, the type and mode of Luo sacrifices are not unlike those of the Jews. Even the Luo practice of segregating cooking utensils is similar to the Jewish practice.

Q. What are your own views about all this?

55. I do accept the Luo beliefs regarding the relationship between life and death. I also believe that God has hidden death and as a result no living person can have the knowledge of the spirit world which clearly exists since only the body is buried at death.

B. FRAGMENTS AND APHORISMS FROM THE THOUGHTS OF ORUKA RANGINYA

I. ON THE CONCEPT OF TIME AND HISTORY

Q Did the Luo refer to things which took place long ago?

1. We find in the oral history of the Luo certain natural phenomena, such as for example famines, which were used to mark the point in time when children were born. There was the famine during which children born were named Madara. This was the famine of Madara. There was the famine of Otuoma, and so forth. This was the only method of keeping records then. There was also the famine of Odongo after which a member of my own family was named. This particular famine was named 'Odongo' because the famine made people kill Odongo believing that Odongo was responsible for the rain failure which caused the bad harvest which in turn caused the famine. Thus the Luo referred to events by linking such events with historic occasions of the past.

Q. What about the future?

2. The Luo also made reference to future events. There was, long ago, a Luo named Onyando who foretold the coming of people with yellow skin i.e. Europeans, to Luo land. It was prophesied that if these strangers came through the land of the

non-Luo neighbours, the Luo would be defeated in battle. However, the Luo were cock sure that they could not be defeated if the fighting took place on their soil as long as they had their shields which gave them much confidence.

3. The Luo were wrong. For, these people came through the land of the non-Luo neighbours and in the ensuing battle, the Luo were defeated. They were driven to the Lake and their land was taken over by the invaders. That is what happened in history. The events occurred as was foretold by the 'prophets'. Now, an event expected to occur in the future is described as 'gima nobi' (that which will come to pass). This future may be infinite.

II. ON RELIGION AND THE CONCEPT OF GOD

- God is an idea -

Q. What do you think God is? What is religion?

4. We have always heard things concerning God. He was thought to be with people fighting in a battle - both sides! Even long before the Europeans came to Africa, there was the idea of God. However, the idea of denomination, a gathering of people which takes a name unto itself, is a new phenomenon.

Examples of these imported denominations are Catholic, Church Missionary Society, and so forth.

5. So then, my own thinking leads me to the conclusion that God resides both in this world as well as in 'heaven': for He is in the wind which blows. He is the concept of 'open-heartedness', i.e. a person who is not greedy but makes sacrifices in order to help others, such a person is 'God'. It must be noted, however, that God lives in the wind. Thus, He is everywhere. It is therefore quite wrong to personalize Him. He is an idea. The idea which represents goodness itself. God is thus a useful concept from the practical point of view.

Q. Before the Europeans came here, did the Luo have their own religion?

6. Now, before the Europeans came, the Luo people had their religion. They worshipped the face of the sun 'wang chieng'. They always looked in the direction of the sun whenever they prayed. Their God was known as Were Hagawa which supposedly had its base in the sun and the moon. They therefore regarded these places as the abode of their God. I think, given the above arguments, that the Luo were quite wrong to think of God in physical terms.

Q. Do you think there are people who do not care about religion?

7. No doubt, there are such people as may be irreligious. But these are not right-thinking people. For surely, everyone ought to love religion for its practical utility. Even a person, because he wished the death of another, would pray God to help him because that other person had done him some wrong. It is not unknown that a thief when setting out to rob his prospective victim may pray for God's assistance so that he is not caught in his act. But I think God is only an idea. An idea, albeit a useful one, in the minds of people.

III. ON THE EDUCATION OF YOUTH

Q. How did the Luo used to teach and train people?

8. Education in the old days was mostly, although not wholly, informal. For example, an old man may gather his sons around his fire-place every evening. Now, people gathered around fire-places learnt a variety of things such as instruction on how to be a successful rearer of animals. Instructions were also given on how to trap ants for chickens; on how to make strong fences so that property and cattle were safe and secure; and so forth.

9. Those who followed these instructions gained much as is evident from the fact that they became, on the whole, better individuals than those who did not accept the teaching. If one was wise, it was expected that other people would come to one for advice. People showed immense gratitude for the pieces of advice which they received from the sages.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN:
FAMILY AND SOCIETY.

- Q. How do you think a man and a woman should live together?
10. Long ago, the woman was given the responsibility for receiving and entertaining visitors to the home. This was the woman's prerogative. However, if her husband sent her on an errand, she was obliged to obey. She was also obliged to heed her husband's warning about matters concerning the home and beyond.
11. For his part, the man was expected to respect his wife. It was part of his duty to provide all necessary amenities, including food for the home. Where the man fully met his responsibilities: if the barns were full, there were cattle to provide milk, and so forth, he was thought to have earned the respect of his wife. Where he failed to

make available all necessary provisions, the woman may justly despise him.

Q. What of matters relating to the use of intellect?

12. Now on matters relating to the use of intellect, I consider the man superior to the woman. Whenever a matter requires the application of sound judgement, the man clearly excels. For where a woman is apt to listen to her 'heart', the man uses his head. There are however some exceptional cases where the woman shows a better and more mature judgement than her husband. These are, however exceptions.

Q. What do you think about the view that woman is inferior to man?

13. There are three categories of responsibility: First, in the home, the house and all that go with its upkeep is under the control of the woman. Secondly, the man is in charge of the homestead. Even when a chief visits a man's home, the chief is obliged to show respect to the man. And thirdly, in matters relating to the community, the chief has full authority and responsibility.

Q. Did people really lived, worked and ate together?
Do you think this type of life should continue?

14. Among the Luo in the old days, people lived, worked and ate together. Those who had no food were given food by those who had to spare. This was important because whenever there was a war, everybody joined in and no one can go to war on an empty stomach. Food is important for both health and strength. People lived together in small groups and thus were able to resist aggression. Everybody knew his neighbour. This has changed with modern development and government. Since there is no threat of aggression against individual clans now, there is, I think, no dire need to stick to this communal life. In any case, life is now rather much more complicated. If there is a war, it is waged by the nation as a whole. The nation's wealth is planned and controlled by the government and therefore no longer a fragmented affair as it used to be.

V. MAN IS SUPERIOR TO ANIMALS

Q. What are the differences between man and animal ?

15. The major distinguishing factor between man and animals lies in the fact that man unlike animals has and uses intellect. Thus, he plans and provides for the future. From this fact, it is

my view that man is superior. Man, as a rational being, is expected to earn his living from the sweat of his brow whereas animals need do no work in the sense of doing a piece of work for reward. Hunting for food is not 'work' in this sense.

16. Now, the right which gives man superiority over animals is natural. Thus all animals, by nature, fear him. Even large and strong animals like elephants and lions fear and so run away from man. If animals did not acknowledge the superiority of man, given the nature of things, they would not run away whenever they encounter man. All animals - both human and lower - learn by instinct to bow to a superior force.

VI. ON THE CONCEPT OF 'FUYANGA' (FREEDOM)

Q. What is the significance of freedom to the Luo?

17. 'Fuyanga' (Freedom) is an important concept to the Luo people as indeed it ought to be to all peoples. If a person had many sons such that many shields (fighters) could come from his home at a time of war, then that person was considered a free man. Or if one had many granaries such that at times of need, one was able to provide food for people other than members of one's immediate family, then one had freedom. Those who were fed were not to be

considered free because they had to depend upon other people to provide them with food.

Q. How can a person gain his freedom?

18. Thus if one liked people and worked hard and was able to help feed others, then one was free. Showing respect for other people or just being well behaved were other ways of gaining one's freedom.

Q. Do the Luo understand the concept 'freedom'?

19. These are generally my own ideas of 'fuyanga' because some people in the Luo community did not seem to understand what freedom meant. They lacked understanding because they wrongly thought that after political independence, clothes, maize, cattle and other things would be given to them without the need of working for them. They thought that free education and non-taxation are fruits of independence whereas independence means only one thing: hard work.

Q. Who do you think is independent and who is not?

20. Thus, those who hold good government jobs and can feed themselves are free. But some people are jobless and are hungry. These are entitled to ask the question: 'Who says that we are independent?'. Farmers who feed themselves are also free. But

those people who sit idle all day and drink beer in the evening neither know nor understand what independence is.

VII. LAW AND PUNISHMENT

Q. Long ago, was there a system of law?

21. Without the concept of law, relationships become impossible and this includes even the simple relationships within family units. The custom which enjoins people to respect their parents and elders is quite an old one. Thus if young girls in a community learn that a man had shown disrespect towards, say, the father of one of their peers, there would be a natural tendency to avoid the man because it was believed that such a person had brought a curse upon himself and all those who are associated with him by his dishonourable behaviour.

Q. How were thieves punished?

22. Generally in the old days, stealing was a very rare phenomenon. However, there was a practice whereby the property of an offender may be 'taken' without his consent. For example, if some member of a neighbouring clan killed a Luo in conflict, a messenger would be instructed to seize the cattle of the offending clan in

restitution. Where the raided people made the mistake of attempting to track their cattle, they fell into Luo hands and they were given an explanation for the seizure of their cattle. This usually settled the matter. Otherwise, they received extra punishment for being unyielding. However, in the unusual event of an individual taking what is not rightfully his own, he is reported to the chief through the elders and he is thereby branded a thief. This was viewed with seriousness.

Q. Were there Courts?; And who sat there?

23. The elders sitting in council with the chief determined cases brought before them. These elders were only those considered the wisest in the village. And the council met under a tree or at some other convenient place in the village. So, if there was drought and animals and people died as a result, the council of elders would be summoned to draw a battle plan. This was a kind of governing authority which everyone accepted.

Q. Was there death penalty in the Luo Community?

24. The Luo, at any rate in one respect were progressive in that they considered capital punishment abhorrent. Of course, not that provision was not made for capital offence. Where a person unlawfully killed

another, a decision would be taken as to the number of cows the offender must pay in restitution. On the other hand, where the offender owned barns, these are emptied and the contents given to the relatives of the murdered man. This was customary law.

Q. What about death as revenge?

25. No one was allowed to kill in revenge for murder. Taking of life was legitimate only in a war situation. There was one exception to this rule: where a stranger killed a Luo unlawfully, this culprit would be shot to death with spears and arrows. This was the only type of revenge killing which was allowed. The custom did not provide for discretionary judgment by elders in this kind of situation and the reason for this is not immediately clear.

Q. If the old system of punishment is compared with the present, which would appear better?

26. If we compare the old system of punishment and the modern, we find that the present system, on the whole, is more progressive. For under the modern system, only an offender is punished. The members of his household, where they are not involved, are spared. Under the old system, the offender and all members of his household were made to suffer.

This is unjust. There can not be any justification for punishing a person for no other reason than that he happens to belong to the family of an offender.

VIII. THE DIFFERENCES MANIFEST IN RACES AND TRIBES ARE ONLY APPARENT, NOT REAL.

Q. What do you think about the differences between the races of the world?

27. The differences which we notice in people: Africans, Europeans, Asians or what have you are only apparent. They are not real. For people are all the same. The only distinction lies in the fact that some people are lazy whilst others are hard working. Those who work hard are called 'Wazungu' (Europeans). Thus where the black man shows signs of industry, he is promptly described as a 'European' as if this label has some magic performing effect. No doubt, it is industry which gives a person great wealth and lots of food. The European worked hard, as a result of which he was able to supply people with food and for this, he was respected. And yet people are equal. They all have the same amount of intelligence since this is not related to skin pigment. None is superior to the other. It only happens that some people are lazy and others are able to utilize the opportunities which are available to them.

Q. Do you think that political independence will make black people work harder?

28. However, with the advent of 'Fuyanga' (freedom) people, black people, will find that they have to work hard. For no one now supplies others with food. The Europeans who used to make food available have now left. Therefore people will have to inculcate the habit of working hard. They may even surpass the Europeans. Necessity may force them into this position.

Q. Do you think that any tribe is superior to another?

29. Just as peoples of different races are equal, peoples of different tribes are also equal. Yet some tribes are very arrogant. Their arrogance leads them to assert, unjustly, that they are superior to other tribes. I think that in most cases, this pride is the result of laziness. People are equal in ability. The most arrogant people in Kenya are the Luo. They believed, quite wrongly, that they were next in importance to the Europeans. Thus they concluded that they were superior to the other tribes. At first, the Nubians from Sudan used to accompany the Europeans. After the war, the Nubians went home and the Luo took their places.

30. The Luo were the soldiers with powers of arrest and detention. Thus they would threaten people with arrest 'because we are like the European'. Pride entered and blocked their heads. On the face of it they appear lazy: for they do seem to concentrate more on dressing well; and less on working hard. Indeed, more attention was paid to showing off. They forgot the virtues of humility.

Q. If, as you say, the Luo are lazy, does it mean that they are inferior to other tribes?

31. In spite of the foregoing however, the Luo were not born lazy. It is the Europeans who made them lazy. The Europeans made them lazy by employing them as servants, soldiers and what nots. Before the Europeans came the Luo were among the most hard working tribes. But the Europeans gave them a soft life and turned them into lazy people just as they made the Nubians lazy.

Q. If the Luo give up this 'easy life', do you think that could make them strong again?

32. So then, if the Luo were to give up the 'easy life', they would become hard working, industrious people once again: Very strong and hard working. They are great warriors and hard-fighters. All the past leading soldiers in Nairobi were Luo. Only fanciful dressing has now made them lazy.

IX. MEDICINE-MEN ARE CLEVER "PSYCHOLOGISTS"

Q. What do you think of the medicine-men? Are they really powerful?

33. A medicine-man 'ajuoke' is a person with vast knowledge in the use of medicinal herbs and also, at times, supposedly able to use magic to obtain some desired results. In so far as he uses herbs, then also he is a herbalist. He is reputed to be powerful; and I think very clever as well. In a Luo home, if a man refuses his wife's request to call in an 'ajuoke' when their child is sick, the woman would be very upset and may even leave the man. In the circumstances, what does a wise man do? He calls in the 'ajuoke' of course without committing himself to the confidence reposed in the magical powers of the man by his wife. If consequently the child gets well, the wife is overjoyed not only that the child gets better but also and probably more crucially, because she had been proved right! Thus the woman's belief in the powers of the medicine-man does help her to cope with the stress of an illness in the family even though the 'ajuoke's' magical powers may have had only little or nothing to do with the child's recovery.
34. So we see that these medicine-men do have, in order to justify their existence, to be good and effective

psychologists. They work by instilling confidence into the sick. A patient believes in his imminent recovery when a medicine-man gives him the assurance that he will get better and almost invariably, the sick person does get better. This confidence is founded upon the false premiss that because a medicine-man is an authority in the art of curing the sick, whenever he speaks 'ex cathedra', he certainly cannot go wrong!

Q. Would you consider the question whether medicine-men believe in God?

35. The question, more appropriately is whether the 'ajuke' do accept a higher authority, i.e. do they believe in God and such like? Now, given the nature of things they are the people most apt, I think, to believe in God or gods as the case may be. For, the belief in his powers which helps to bring him his customers particularly those powers which depend upon 'faith' rather than 'proof' belong to the same genus as the belief in an equally mystical powers of some supernatural God or gods. Thus the 'ajuke' believes that God or gods can help to 'direct' his prospective customers to him. It is therefore not surprising that the medicine-men themselves do believe in supernatural and therefore superstitious entities.

36. So then, to be successful, the 'ajuke' must be very daring, very, bold. Among the very notable amongst them are the following famous people: Okore, son of Ogonda;

Osolo, son of Otekra; and even Jomo Kenyatta. If they predict an occurrence and they have luck on their side, then the event took place. Luck is therefore also an important element in this equation: Luck and chance. Where the 'ajuoke' prophesied ten future events and only one event of the ten occurred, then that medicine-man was in bad luck and may even become unpopular as a result. However, when he enjoys a run of good luck, the events which he divines do actually come to pass. Thus these predictions have little or no statistical validity although very redeeming in psychological and emotional terms.

X. ON WHY PEOPLE DIE: DEATH IS NATURE'S WAY
OF EASING CONGESTION IN THE UNIVERSE.
HEAVEN IS THEREFORE AN ILLUSION

Q. Why do people die? What is death?

37. Well now, I have given a lot of thought to the question: 'Why do people die?' and as a result, I have come to the conclusion that some people have to die in order that others cannot only, or rather merely, have 'life' but 'live'. It is because death removes some people that those who are spared have enough food to live on otherwise majority would have to live in a state of perpetual hunger. And there is also the problem of land. The living get food and land they would not

have got if people did not die. Therefore death eases congestion in the world. A deceased leaves behind him farm land and all other goods which he possessed. Thus those who take the deceased's place have his land upon which they are able to farm and do other things besides. Therefore death is not bad. A little thought is enough to show that even when it causes sorrow, it also helps to stabilize society.

38. And on some occasions, death removes bad people and replaces them with good people. In spite of this nature's beneficent 'wastage', we find that the world's population is ever increasing with the attendant problems which this phenomenon generates. Some time ago, there were only two other homes in this area apart from my own. At the present time, there are more than fifty homes here in spite of the fact that some of the original residents have passed away. Now, consider what the resulting situation would have looked like if certain of the original residents have not been removed by death! Chaos, absolute chaos, I should not wonder, would have been the order of the day with people against each other in perpetual struggle for possession and therefore existence. Life would have been brutish and probably much shorter than it is presently. But death has somehow magnanimously saved humanity from this nasty possibility by

the removal of some so that those left may enjoy fuller and more beneficent lives.

39. Is not death, given the foregoing, therefore analogous to the thinning of the maize-farm by the farmer. Indeed I suggest that it is a form of progressive development, or if you prefer, replacement. For it gives members of the younger generation more scope and opportunity to develop themselves.

Q. Do the dead have another life? What about heaven?

40. What about heaven? Well, the very idea is fictitious: It is an illusion. From all that we know so far, upon death, man's existence simply ceases, it comes to an end. Yes, the only other life, possible life there is is dream! The dead are in the wind.

Q. The dead are in the wind?

41. The dead are in the wind. Now if one looks at the sky, one finds that it is all cloud: at times clear, and at other times dark. No one can climb up and reach it. For, actually there is nothing up there besides the stars; the substance which we recognize as the sky is only what is at the end of our sight. It is as far as we can see. Therefore, there is no justification for the view or belief that heaven is up there in the sky or indeed anywhere else.

So, the dead are in the wind; not in the sky or heaven or what have you.

42. And yet, the dead are with us here and now but only the clever among us can 'see' them. Now look at a tree shaking whether violently or gently. What do you think 'causes' the tree to shake? It is the wind. And since the dead live in the wind, it is the dead shaking the tree. The dead are with us here in this world.

Q. Do you mean we are in the same world as the dead?

43. We are all - the dead and the living - together in the same one known world. The dead do not go to another world. 'Heaven' is therefore here on earth. It is here!

C. FRAGMENTS AND APHORISMS FROM THE THOUGHTS OF NYANDARA OIGARA

I. ON GOD, RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Q. What do you think about the Kisii traditional idea of God? What did they call God? Why 'God' exactly?

1. The Kisii traditional God was known as 'Engoro'. The belief was that 'Engoro' created or made things, i.e. both animate and inanimate things. However, the Kisii did not make any attempt to posit a creation myth. I think that this Kisii view of the origin of things is justified, because when one reflects upon the phenomena which furnish the universe, one cannot escape the conclusion that, for example, the person embodies a mystery which does not appear explainable in any other way than that there must exist a prior more knowledgeable and powerful being who originated the universe and its contents.

Q. Did the Kisii have a mode of worship? Did they worship 'Engoro' as God is worshipped by Christians?

2. Now, although 'Engoro' was revered and was expected to provide, and therefore treated as the provider of things which satisfied the needs of the Kisii, 'Engoro' was not worshipped as such. I mean that there was nothing in traditional Kisii as an organized religion. Certainly not religious organizations, both traditional and modern, as we experience them now in Kenya.

Q. Can you elaborate upon this please?

3. Let me attempt an explanation. When, for example, a couple had a child, the practice was that the couple should express their gratitude to 'Engoro'. Hence on the third day following the birth of the child, the parents would carry the child out of the house and hold him in such a manner that he lies or leans towards the east which was thought to be the place where the sun 'came' from since it was believed that the sun 'rose' in the east. The parents of the child would then ask the blessings of 'Engoro' for the child.

4. Now, as a result of their experience of life, the Kisii came to understand that in going through life, a person has certain experiences: some of which are experiences of joy and others of tribulation and sickness. Thus a provision was made in society for some individuals to play certain essential roles. 'Ex hypothesi', in order to diagnose the cause of a sickness or disease, it was necessary that a person was found who had the knowledge and experience of various types of sicknesses. It was also necessary that the same person or another had the ability to determine, 'a posteriori', the cause or causes of such illnesses by means which the Kisii thought ought to go beyond the explanation of events in the ordinary everyday sense.

- Q. Is there a link between the activities of spirits and the explanation of events?
5. Since the traditional Kisii held the belief that there were times when ancestral spirits were either happy or unhappy; they sought to explain misfortunes, joys and fortunes in terms of the whims and caprices of these spirits of dead people. It was therefore considered part of the duty of the person versed in the knowledge of the interpretation of causes of sickness and so forth to prescribe what he or she judged was necessary to do in order to propitiate these 'unhappy' ancestral spirits.
6. However, where the sick person fully recovered from his illness, it was not only the ancestral spirits which were 'thanked' for the 'release' of the sick person from his malady, 'Engoro' also shared part of this gratitude. What is not immediately quite clear to me here in why 'Engoro', although was never really blamed for a misfortune or illness, was duly considered worthy of 'thanks' alongside ancestral spirits whenever a patient recovered from his illness. There appears, I think, an inconsistency in this traditional Kisii practice.

Q. Why do you think the Kisii held this practice?

7. It seems to me that the idea that ancestral spirits were capable of being, as it were 'unhappy' as a result of particular actions of individuals was a ploy to guide the actions of people against doing that which is evil. For it was the view of the Kisii that doing only those things which are good, right and wholesome is the only way by which their society can be preserved and improved. The question here, I think, is why no one ever thought of directly appealing to the judgement of individuals since there have always been many with good judgement among the Kisii.

8. Now, if, as indeed it was claimed, retribution awaits all wrong actions; and this effect was discerned in terms of illnesses and misfortunes, then it seems to me that the emphasis was not to be placed upon the activities of spirits and what not. To be sure, it would have been more proper if placed upon the actions of men. Paradoxically, the Kisii would say, justly, I think, 'monwa muya orusia njombe serere'. In purely general terms, this means that a good behaviour repays its effort. I think this apt.

Q. Could you give an illustration please?

9. Now, there is an interesting case of an elder who was involved in decision making with respect to

the wrong-doings of individuals in Kisii society. This judge once penalized an offender for a crime. However, when a member of his own household was arraigned before him for a similar offence, he endeavoured to minimize the penalty by citing certain circumstances which he claimed were extenuating.

10. But this drama provoked certain other elders to saying 'Mogamba gitogo chimori inyanya' (However, influential or learned a judge may be, he would find it very awkward when he is asked to determine a case in which a member of his family is involved). Therefore I would say that it is not proper that a person, however good or virtuous, should be allowed to be judge in his own cause. This is a traditional Kisii view which I think worthy of retention because of its value.

II. UNDERSTANDING IS PRIOR TO EXPLANATION

Q. What are the criteria for the determination of wisdom?

11. Now, in the past, the Kisii elders had a way of determining, who was likely to become a wiseman at a future time. They did this by watching very carefully how children interact and what kind of result this interaction bore. For example, children in a group do a number of things. They learn skills

which they later on apply in various activities, they play games of all sorts, and so forth. So then, in order to determine whether a young person would become a wise man or woman in the future, it was deemed necessary that that young person was closely watched to see how well he or she accommodated other people in his or her group. A careful watch was also made to note what kind of contributions the young person made to the group. All these were carefully monitored and an assessment made.

12. From this procedure, we can see that explanation is the function of understanding. That is to say, understanding is prior to explanation. For, we can only explain meaningfully what we already understand. Thus in order for a young person to qualify for selection as a future leader, that person must exhibit a high degree of understanding of the norms and values of the society.

III. THE KISII IDEA OF TIME

- Q. How would the Kisii explain what he expects to take place, say, in one hundred years time?
13. There are, among others, two parables in Kisii which show, I think, that the Kisii do have a concept of and indeed do make provision the future. The first proverb: 'Karie bike buna esiamobarere ngobo, otigarerie oba inani', exemplifies from an empirical view point, what actually takes place in society.

For the poor, through hardship, had learnt to be frugal whereas those who are well-off in contrast are usually rather extravagant. So, the elders use the wisdom which the poor exhibit by their frugality to caution society against extravagance.

14. On the other hand, the elders have also observed that whenever there was plenty of food and drinks, people tended to consume the best portion often with little or no regard for the future. Thus the elders would advise people to 'karie bike otigarerie ba-inani', i.e. people ought not consume all available resources for: the future, if we are prudent, need to be taken an account or cognizance of. I think this can be better illustrated by the phenomenon of the thatcher and the rain-maker. Unless the thatcher is sufficiently efficient, the blessings which the rain-maker brings to society soon turns into disaster. So the thatcher ought to take account, in his work, of the future when rain would be needed for various purposes.
15. On the linguistic aspect, the Kisii do employ certain words, for example, to depict their concept of a dynamic present, past and future. They also speak of prophets and prophecies. Thus we have the following:

'bono'	-	now	)	Dynamic
'rero'	-	today	)	Present
'igoro'	-	yesterday	)	
'kare'	-	past		
'mosuko'	-	future		
'okobana' (verb)	-	to prophesy		
'obobani (noun)	-	prophecy		
'omobani' (noun)	-	prophet		

IV. ANACHRONISM AND TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND VALUES

Q. What is the Kisii attitude to outdated traditional beliefs?

16. The Kisii tend, on the whole, to be pragmatists in their acceptance and propagation of values, beliefs and traditions. However, they tend also to accept certain practices, for example :circumcision, as absolute and invariable. On the other hand when they consider or judge a practice as having become obsolete, they do not seem to have much difficulty in allowing it to lapse. For example, 'enyangweso' is a song, a special song which portrays such phenomena as famine, invasion of locusts, and so forth. After a period of time, the song is considered to have fallen into disuse and so is allowed to lapse.

Q. Can you offer another illustration?

17. Much flexibility is allowed in the practice of dowry for: where, say, five cows are required

in settlement of a dowry, this requirement may be waived and instead one cow only may be accepted in full settlement when it is believed that insistence upon what tradition or practice requires may cause the bride-groom and his family unnecessary hardship.

18. Now, where dowry is settled through such payment made in form of cows, it is the practice that although the bride's parents who receive the cows are entitled to ensure that the settlement is not partial, they do invariably accord the bride-groom and his family a sympathetic consideration. Thus the practice is to allow the bride-groom's family the final opportunity to milk the cows lest they be left without any milk. The Kisii therefore say 'abararia ngombe nbamuma tiga morwa ngombe abinere' - (those who receive cows do not leave the givers in difficulty).

Q. What are your own views on this question of traditions?

19. On the question of traditions, I think I am, on the whole, squarely on the side of the traditional Kisii except that I have, upon reflection, come to reject the traditional view still holding on to the absolute invariable practice of circumcision at any rate where female circumcision (clitoridectomy)

is concerned. Male circumcision is still to be tolerated but not as an invariable practice. It is now my view that since more harm than good is done to the female, the practice ought to be discontinued or those who reject the practice should no longer be penalized. The imposition of the sanction that a woman upon whom clitoridectomy has not been performed should not be married by a Kisii is unwarranted. For surely this state of affairs is pernicious. So then, I accept some traditional views and values where they are found useful and reject those which are now out of date or considered pernicious.

V. SOME MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

Q. Did the traditional Kisii believe in miracles?
And what are your own views about this?

20. However, much knowledgeable man may become, there are certain mysterious phenomena in the universe which simply cannot be explained in physical terms. For, these phenomena defy understanding in the ordinary sense of confronting or being confronted by a phenomenon and carrying out a systematic examination. It is probably a good thing that man can still be baffled by certain mysteries of the universe otherwise the universe would have become very trite indeed.

21. My conclusion here is the result of certain personal experiences. Once while I was at the base of Manga ridge not far from my home here in Kisii, I saw flames on top of the ridge but this experience is totally incompatible with what I know of the natural conditions which obtain on this part of the ridge. The top of the ridge is rocky and bear hardly any vegetation: green or dry. The question therefore is this: where did the fire come from? On another occasion, I heard cocks crowing from the same area at night. On yet another occasion, I heard voices but did not see people who could have been taken to be the source of the voices.

Q. How did you interpret or explain this personal experience? And could you not have been mistaken?

22. This experience led me to the view that there are some mysterious forces permeating the universe which forces defy a physical explanation. However, I feel bound to concede that although these experiences aroused my curiosity, fear, naked fear, prevented me from making an on the spot investigation. On each occasion, I examined the scene of the incident the following morning and found no evidence to confirm my experience. I do not think that I could have

been mistaken on all the occasions when these experiences took place. But it may justly be objected, I think, that my failure to verify the experiences as and when they occurred does cast some shadow of doubt upon the authenticity of the events.

Q. Could you please explain the Kisii proverb about 'sasati'?

23. The proverb goes like this: 'Binto mbikone sasati eibora mache na morero oibora ibu' (Is it not miraculous that 'sasati', a kind of papyrus reed, bears or gives forth water as fire consumes things and leaves behind ashes). The view of the traditional Kisii is that sasati is the mother or source of river for the reason that if you plant the reed on a fairly dry patch of land, after some time, the area immediately surrounding the position occupied by the reed tend to become waterlogged. It is assumed that the water came from the plant hence the assumption that 'sasati' is the source or mother of running water (river).

24. Although I do accept the Kisii view that there is something miraculous about this 'sasati' reed which one is unable to explain in purely physical terms, I reject the conclusion that 'sasati' is the source or mother of river. I think that the source of a river is traceable to some other phenomenon and

so can be explained in purely physical terms. But now, what can the 'mother of running water or river' mean?

VI. ON THE OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY IN TRADITIONAL KISII

Q. Were people allowed to own large estates or property in the old days?

25. The traditional Kisii society allowed an individual with a large family to own an estate commensurate with the size of his family. Thus it was not unknown that a family or clan might own large area of land.

Q. But supposes an individual simply says: ' I want to own a large estate and I am prepared to work for it'. What would have been the attitude of society to that individual?

26. Society would have let him alone except of course that people and clans fought over land in those days. So the situation was that people with large estates ran the risk of having to defend these estates against attacks every so often. This discouraged some although not by any means all would-be hoarders and property speculators and also made people live in tight knit communities so

that they were more able to repel attackers. But there was no rule or regulation in traditional Kisii society forbidding the ownership of large estates.

Q. What is your own view about this human nature to acquire wealth and property often inordinately?

27. I do not consider the ownership of property a wrong thing provided such wealth is acquired legitimately. Why should not a man, who is prepared to work for it, own many animals and a large farm?

VII. ON LAW AND PUNISHMENT

Q. What is the nature of the Kisii system of law and punishment?

28. The traditional Kisii had their own system of law and punishment. This system was a sophisticated one. Let me explain. Now, when a man, for example, was tried for killing another person, the first question the Kisii determined was not merely that one person killed another but rather, whether there was something in the facts of the case which made the killing justifiable and so lawful. This is fine.

29. However, after this laudable initial position, there is an unwarranted element of parochialism in the award of punishment to those found guilty. For

Example, where the murderer was a Kisii, the elders might decide that punishment in form of payment made as compensation to the family of the victim was enough. It is only where the murder was a particularly violent one that a Kisii might be condemned to death. On the other hand, if the offender was a non-Kisii, he was simply executed without any consideration given to other forms of punishment. This is clearly wrong for the tribe of an offender ought not play any role in the nature or extent of punishment. What is equitable and therefore important is that a person is guilty of an offence and so punished.

30. There was also a procedure whereby an offender may be imprisoned although the purpose of the imprisonment was not one of punishment, rather it was that of detention until the offender's relations became able to pay the fine imposed upon the offender. This created an anomaly because some offenders were detained for unnecessarily long periods where their relatives found it difficult to raise the fine.

VIII. AGAINST TRIBALISM

- Q. What is your view about the existence of so many tribes in Kenya?
31. I think there is much to be said against tribalism because it was root cause of the inter-tribal wars

of the period before colonization with the loss of so many lives often unnecessarily and pointlessly. Although there are still traces of this evil, it is gradually dying out. For, tribal boundaries have now become much less important such that people are able to move freely from one place to another unmolested. This is one of the most important innovations of modernity.

IX. THE IDEA OF FREEDOM

Q. What do you think about the concept 'freedom'?

32. To my mind, 'freedom' involves one being able to go wherever one pleases and it also involves the ability to speak one's mind openly. Even from within the restrictions which traditional values imposed upon the individual, there is an allowance made for the possibility of a dialogue. For example, where an individual felt that there was something pernicious about a particular tradition, he had an access of dialogue to the elders. However, he could not and indeed was never permitted to act in a way which was considered contrary to such tradition.

Q. Would you still consider the individual as free?

33. As I have already explained, some traditions were total and absolute and the sanctions against recalcitrant members of society were very harsh and often uncompromising. The only concession allowed an individual in this dilemma was that of trying to persuade enough number of elders to examine the particular tradition with a view to modification.

34. The great drawback of the traditional society is discernible in the fact that values were never really totally discarded. The most that an individual could expect was that an obsolete value may lapse or fall into disuse. I suppose this is in the nature of things.

Now that the philosophical reconstructions of the reasonings of the selected sages are complete, I think that there is a need to analyse and also add a theoretical commentary wherever appropriate.

This I attempt in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RECONSTRUCTED CASES

I. PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RECONSTRUCTION.

1. On Analysis

It is the view of G.E. Moore¹ that we get knowledge from philosophical analysis. His argument for this position is that philosophical analysis produces propositions which are either true or false. Thus when we consider a proposition such as 'This here is a human hand', Moore insists that all that is required is that we make an appeal to sense-datum in order to determine the truth or falsity of the proposition. This is in accordance with commonsense view of things.

However, what the phenomenon 'sense-datum' is in itself, Moore himself admits he has no clue although he is of the firm conviction that the answer can be ascertained. The ascertainment of this answer, Moore believes, will result in the discovery of a philosophical truth.

Now, Wittgenstein and those who followed his inclination would have nothing to do with this view because for them any quest for a philosophical truth only creates problems to which there are no solutions. Why then compound confusions, they ask, by attempting the impossible!

But then, in fairness to Moore, one ought to concede the point that he is prudent enough to say, consistently I think, that analysis should be taken only as one of the methods of philosophy. He is certainly not dogmatic on this point. And again, Moore's main concern is one of relating analysis to concepts and the like rather than to language as such.

This relation, for Moore, is one at the 'meta' second-order level. But then, given his whole-hearted defence of common sense, it is difficult to see how analysis could be tied to concepts to the exclusion of language provided of course that the language is at the 'meta' and not 'object' level.

Now, Russell's theory of singular expressions, as Ayer sees it, is a paradigm of philosophical analysis. This theory has as its cornerstone Bentham's idea of 'paraphrasis'. The term 'paraphrasis' involves the provision of equivalent sentences which sentences must contain the term being analysed.

Now two essential purposes are served by this procedure. First, it helps to eliminate unwelcome objects; and secondly, 'sentence' becomes the unit of communication rather than 'word'. This brings a measure of richness into discourse for the 'sentence' encompasses more and therefore so much the richer than the 'word'. Thus we are able to speak meaningfully of a phenomenon such as the activities of witches which may or may not be

fictitious without we ourselves being committed to the logic that witches do as a matter of fact exist.

So then, the view of 'analysis' which I take is discernible in the metaphor of treating words as tools, i.e. in order to be able to claim that one understands the meaning of a word, first, one must know how to use the word. The result is integrity of meaning or if you prefer, Occam's razor. This is one effective way of removing splurge from discourse.

2. The Significance of Reconstruction in Philosophy.

Now, when we consider, analogically, the problems which mediaeval philosophy generated, we find from the mediaeval society point of view, that these problems consist in the absorption and assimilation of the individual. In order to remove, or at any rate, alleviate these problems, it was necessary that the individual was liberated. But then, the liberation of the individual created its own problems. These are the problems of modern life which are discernible in the attempts at reconstruction, i.e. reform and reorganisation in society.

Thus the significance of reconstruction is that it affords the opportunity of remaking ideas, concepts and so forth in order to make them clearer and perhaps also more elegant. This is how mediaeval philosophy was transformed into modern philosophy². And modern philosophy itself is in an on-going,

unending process of reconstruction.

So then, at the second-order, individual level, we have the construction of philosophy whenever attempts are made to present personal reasonings in a critical fashion. This inevitably involves ~~the~~ crucial element of thinking: deliberate thinking. It is this deliberate thinking which separates the philosopher from the flutist, the dustman or indeed the politician. So, this deliberate thinking or intelligence is the 'via-media', a kind of corridor theory which affords the means of the second-order constructions of the individual sage. These constructions form the mass of the fragments from which the reconstructions of the previous chapter was obtained.

It is therefore my hope that other philosophers would examine and re-examine these reconstructions with a view to producing further reconstructions so that the ideas and reasonings of the sages presented in this Study may be made even clearer and more elegant than they have been presented here.

II. ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

1. PAUL MBUYA.

Affinity between 'time' and 'history'.

When the phenomenon of ideas is viewed from the general perspective of a particular context in history, one is almost inexorably led to the recurring philosophical question about the nature of time which question is itself as old as time.

Given that in the traditional environment, time is conceived of in psychological terms whereas in the modern, science orientated societies the conception is mechanical, the philosophical conception of time must surely be the function of the particular time in which that conception takes place.

So now, when we examine Mbuya's exposition of the Luo concept of time, we find that he posits an affinity between 'time' and 'history'. For it is this 'affinity', argues the sage, which determines the way the concept of time is used. For example, an important event, say, a famine was used to delineate the approximate time of the occurrence of some other relatively less important events.

The time thus delineated is only approximate because the concept of time in the traditional African environment is psychological, i.e. not precise as

opposed to that other which is precise because it is mechanical. The sage in his exposition of the Luo concept of time explains that the concept is linear for people make references to past, present and future events.

In his justification of Luo concept of distant future time, the sage explains that although no one single word brings forth the meaning of the English word 'future', the Luo do speak of gi ma nobi. He also cites the activities of 'johulo' (prophets) to reinforce his view that the Luo do possess the concept of future time. He explains,

'Prophets', (Johulo) in Dholuo, for example, prophesied the coming of Europeans to Luo land long before the time of my own generation and even before our own fathers were born. These diviners also foresaw a famine which they claimed, before the event, would force people to eat animal skins (see page 108 above).

This illustration by Mbuya is very important and I think revealing particularly in view of the denial by Professor John Mbiti that Africans possess the concept of distant future time.

Uniformity of Nature

Mbuya here presents a very lucid and balanced account of, as it appears to him, the proof that not only is it the case that God exists but that, in the nature of things, there can be only one God. This view clearly contradicts what obtains in many traditional African societies and also in the earlier Greek milieu with regard to the belief in a pantheon of gods.

Mbuya reasons, even without being prompted, that any position taken needs justification. Thus, on the question of the existence of one God, he cites uniformity of nature and the peace and tranquility which holds the universe together. For, reasons the sage, if there were many opposing gods ruling the universe, there would almost necessarily have been rivalry and jealousy among these gods with consequent chaos and destruction. The question for philosophy here, I think, is not whether these arguments are unassailable. The point is that here we have a sage involved in deliberate thinking.

Balance of forces.

Now, on the question relating to man and woman, Mbuya presents a view which is as interesting as it is original. This is the thesis of 'balance of forces'. He argues, I think, quite convincingly that the differences manifest in man and woman are only apparent since in reality, man and woman have their

respective attributes balanced by nature. Thus we find that man has the indisputable ability to do certain things better than woman and vice-versa.

For example, a man can run much faster than a woman, do heavier kinds of work, etc. On the other hand, a woman is endowed with the unique ability to carry pregnancy, bear and suckle a child. For this reason, insists the sage, man is neither superior to nor master of woman. This thesis of 'balance of forces' seems to me original and very cogent.

On Freedom

Mbuya's view of 'freedom' does coincide with the early Greek view of the condition or state of being able to go wherever one pleases unhindered. To illustrate his point, Mbuya uses the analogy of a bonded slave who becomes 'free' when he is released from his bond and thus able to go wherever he pleases and also act in accordance with his own wishes. For, the ability to act as one wills only comes to one when one's will is unfettered.

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However, Mbuya in his attempt to relate this concept of freedom or 'thuolo' in Dholuo to practical everyday action finds that we are never really free. Even those who thought that Africans were 'free' before being colonised, argues the sage, are mistaken because Africans then as indeed now have always lived under some constraint or other. Therefore, concludes

Mbuya, political independence can, properly, only be viewed as a nominal phenomenon.

But now, might one not be able to argue, inspite of Mbuya's points, that there is still a sense in which people are free? For when philosophers now speak of 'freedom', at any rate in general terms, the concept is not intended to be taken in an absolute sense.

A subtle distinction is made by Mbuya between 'freedom' and 'happiness' for

...if a person has a lot of wealth, (and he) is restrained or affected in his actions by the will of others, then the best he is entitled to claim is happiness not freedom. Therefore no one has complete freedom. (see page 125 above).

To info

'Might' is not 'right'

Mbuya argues justly, I think, that the view that might is right is arrogant and dangerous. For whenever 'right' is subjected to 'might' there is the beginning of totalitarianism, terror and splurge⁴. How very true.

2. ORUKA RANGINYA

Now by far Ranginya's main contribution lies, I think, in the very able way he has put his ideas together on the difficult question of God, death and life after death.

On religion and the concept of God

Now, the sage began unfolding his thoughts by citing two main contradictions which taken together go a long way to show that the very idea that God exists in a substantial form is fictitious. However, the idea of God in an ideal, absolute sense has its practical utility.

First, Ranginya explains that whenever two parties are engaged in a battle, they have somehow always believed that God was on both sides but God cannot logically be on both sides since both sides in a war cannot have right on their respective sides. This argument is sound for we do know that when the cause or causes of a war are analysed, one side or the other is usually the aggressor. So, if there were God, he would be good and so would not support aggression.

And secondly, since God is thought to be both in heaven and on earth simultaneously, then he cannot be a material object and therefore could not logically have the image of man. But it makes sense, from the point of view of the sage, to consider God as an

idea which represents goodness in an abstract sense. This idea, in the view of Ranginya, does differ from that other philosophical view that God is man made after which, as Professor Andre Mercier explains this position, man

...sub-jects himself or submits to the object as if the latter were the master and he, the former, were the servant⁵.

So then, this idea differs because in taking the idea man turns it into good pragmatic use. The sage insists:

God... is in the wind which blows. He is the concept of 'open-heartedness', i.e. a person who is not greedy but... help(s) others, such a person is 'God' It is... wrong to personalize Him. He is an idea. The idea which represents goodness itself. God is thus a useful concept from the practical point of view. (see page 135 above).

Death and life after death

Ranginya expresses the view that death too has its own utility: for death is nature's way of easing the congestion on earth. He argues thus:

The living get food and land they would not have got if people did not die. Therefore death eases congestion in the world. (see pages 150-1 above)..

Ranginya's attitude towards death is in striking contrast to that of another sage, Muganda Okwako, who lost his temper when he was asked to comment upon the phenomenon, death. Okwako said that any discussion of 'death' is tantamount to wishing one's own death. And so he refused to answer the question put to him thereby ending the conversation.

Then, the sage Ranginya explains that each person's existence, certainly as we understand it, ends at death. Therefore heaven is an illusion for there is nothing but a state of endless dream upon death. So, insists the sage,

the dead are in the wind; not in the sky or heaven or what have you. (see page 153 above)

This shows in clear terms, I think, the futility of groping towards heaven instead of concentrating upon living a good worthwhile life here on earth. After all, the only world we know, and so have warrant to claim the knowledge of, is the world of here and now.

Man and Animal

Now, on the question of man and animal, Ranginya explains that the main difference between the two lies in the fact that man has and uses intellect which animals lack. However, in insisting that man's superiority is discernible in the fact that man makes provision for the future and that man must work for his daily bread, I think the sage is mistaken.

For animals, too, do make provision for their future and indeed there are those of them who work as hard as human beings for their general well-being. What, perhaps, is incontestable in terms of the difference between man and animal is this: that man's life is one of continuous experience hence man's past, present and future are concatenated.

On the other hand, the kind of life which animals lead is of a static unchanging type so that they are pre-occupied only with the present and the future showing no concern whatsoever for the past. The reason for this is that they lack the ability⁶. Another major distinguishing factor is that man, because his thought system is organised, has the use of language guided by rules which are not rigid or inviolate although these rules cannot be violated with impunity.

Animals, for their part, too, use sign system but this system is rigid and perhaps more importantly, incapable of development. It is this possession of language by man which has led Suzanne Langer to write:

Between the clearest animal call of love or warning or anger and man's least trivial word lies a whole day of creation - or in modern phrase a whole chapter of evolution'.

It is the same consideration, I think, which led Karl Marx, writing in Capital, to state that although it may be validly argued that in its construction of her cells, the 'bee puts to shame many an architect', nevertheless, '...the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality'. Pascal too, states that:

Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. ... Thus all our dignity consists in thought. ... Let us then strive to think well; (for) that is the basic principle of morality.

3. NYANDARA OIGARA

The question of Creation

The sage Oigara, too, holds the view of the existence of a universe maker for, in some significant respects like the Cosmological Arguments, the person and the contents which furnish the universe are full of mysteries.

These mysteries are such that the view that man came about by accident or chance, according to Oigara, is simply untenable. Therefore, the sage insists,

...there must exist a prior more knowledgeable and powerful being who originated the universe and its contents. (see page 154 above).

Now, this creator is known in Kisii as 'Engoro'.

Thus far, the sage is in agreement with his people.

However, he is very clear in his own mind about what he perceives as an inconsistency in the practice of the Kisii with regard to the relation which ancestral spirits and 'Engoro' both are held to have with people.

Kisii system of morality

He argues, I think justly, that since only ancestral spirits are blamed for the misfortunes which befall people, there is no justification for allowing

'Engoro' to have a share of the 'gratitude' which people express to ancestral spirits for the good things which come their way. If it is correct and rational to hold ancestral spirits responsible for the good

as well as the bad things of life, the sage reasons correctly, why hold 'Engoro' responsible only for the good things?

In any case, insists the sage, the view that ancestral spirits do punish people for their wrong-doings is a ploy to uphold the traditional Kisii system of morality. Oigara believes that it would be more rational to appeal, in a direct fashion, to the judgement of individuals rather than through this ingenious and elaborate theory of punishment and reward.

The need for a free intelligence

My own arguments against the theists in a paper which I wrote for the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in 1980⁹ are similar to the reasoning of sage Oigara on this problem. In that paper I reject the myth of the original sin and advocate a morality without the idea of 'sin', 'God', 'hell' and all the rest of it. In short, a morality based upon rational arguments, pure and simple. For, as Bertrand Russell was never tired of insisting.

A good world... needs a fearless outlook
and a free intelligence¹⁰.

Explanation and Understanding

Oigara made a very important philosophical point that explanation is the function of understanding: for understanding is prior to explanation. African ideas, concepts and so forth have been subjected to a number of misunderstanding and so misinterpretations by foreign researchers. For, they made attempts to explain African ideas

using their own cultures as the models of understanding rather than the African cultures to which these ideas belong.

Now, the word 'understanding' does not relate, at any rate in this context, merely to the ability to speak a language because meaning is supplied by our experience of the world. For, it is not unknown that a person may be versed in the syntactical relationship of words without having a full understanding of the meaning of the words.

Professor E.E. Evans-Pritchard cites the example of the word 'supernatural' which, if interpreted in the Native Nuer belief to mean the same as in the European belief system, would make absolute nonsense of what the Natives mean. Now, within the European context, this word conveys something outside the ordinary operation of the laws of causality. However, in the native scenes,

...many people are convinced that deaths are caused by witchcraft...(Thus) to speak of witchcraft being for these peoples a supernatural agency hardly reflects their own view of the matter, since from their point of view nothing could be more natural.¹¹

So, as far as the natives are concerned, for a person not to die as a result of witchcraft is a most unnatural thing indeed. The British sociologist, Bryan Wilson, too, insists that there is a sense in which the word

'understand' could be used such that

... mediaeval society is understandable only
to mediaeval man¹².

The problem of anachronism

From the account of sage Oigara, the Kisii are on the whole progressive in their ordering of their society although because the culture is traditional, they still somehow consider certain practices and values absolute and invariable.

The sage feels inclined to tolerate male circumcision but is wholly against clitoridectomy (female circumcision). However, in tolerating male circumcision, he explains that the practice ought not be taken as invariable and absolute. This view in Oigara is in classical liberal traditions. And opinion now seem united on the uselessness of clitoridectomy: for it does so much harm to the woman with no discernible advantage.

It is right and proper, I think, that whatever is good in African traditions is kept and modernised where necessary. Oigara, too, is of this opinion for there is nothing to be gained from wholesale condemnation of traditional culture simply because it is not modern. However, where values and ideas have become anachronistic, they should be made to make way for modern ideas if only for the reason that progress must be made.

And now, finally, we come to the concluding chapter where I re-examine the three main trends in this study.

These are:

- 1) Philosophy and its African orientation;
- 2) The contribution of sage-philosophers to African philosophy; and
- 3) Philosophy and culture.

NOTES

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CHAPTER SIX

C O N C L U S I O N

I. PHILOSOPHY AND ITS AFRICAN ORIENTATION

It is now time to bring this work to a conclusion by giving consideration to some of the salient points which I discussed in the previous chapters.

In chapter one, I began by the examination of the nature of philosophy. I showed that this Nature portrays two aspects: the folk/traditional and the critical aspects which respectively forms the first and second order. The view which I take that philosophy is, unlike science, an enterprise with no clearly defined or agreed methodology, presented some problem. For philosophical questions, in the nature of things, are not concerned with counting noses, i.e. with agreement or consensus. It is an individual or personal enterprise.

However, there has to be found some ways and means of doing philosophy such that its systematic procedure is not eroded. This I attempted by describing philosophy as a discipline which is recognizable by the critical thinking and reflection which take place within it. But then, I conceded that the expressions of this reflection may and indeed do take a variety

of ways depending on whose philosophical work is being considered.

In the discussion which followed immediately upon this, I argued that African philosophy too, must need satisfy the criterion of critical reflection which I have claimed for philosophy in the second-order sense otherwise it will have no warrant for being described as a philosophical enterprise. Now this position raised two main problems. First, what is to be done with the legacy of logical positivism; and secondly, the view of some Africanists that once you have collected chronicles of the so-called communal world-views of some Africans, you have 'ipso-facto' produced a piece of work in African philosophy.¹

As to the first problem, I think no one now takes, at any rate seriously, the view of some positivists that by the use of logic and mathematics, philosophy could become a scientific enterprise and thereby absorb a certain degree of certainty. This, no doubt, was entirely fictional, albeit a convenient and useful one from this particular point of view.

For, even science itself, the supposed cornerstone of this view, given the tentative nature of scientific discovery, lacks the certainty of logic and

mathematics. And it is, I think, matter of historical records that some, though not by any means all, scientific discoveries have been found wanting and so discarded for newer and more effective and cogent ones.

Now the most modern paradigm representative of the view that communal chronicles constitute a philosophy, the Sodipo/Hallen approach,² did not offer anything new and original. For, I believe, this approach failed at the most crucial point to justify the selection of the Yoruba 'onisehun' (the learned in the art of medicine) as the contact group. For, there are many other groups within the Yoruba society just as able to enumerate the various ideas, concepts and so on of the Yoruba.

Even the more serious lapse is their methodology or perhaps more appropriately, absence of one. The persons contacted, rather than being asked to construct their own personal individual philosophy, were requested to give a chronicle of Yoruba ideas, concepts, and so forth.

I made the strong assertion that chronicles, even at the best of times, do not make philosophical treatises anywhere. Although it could be argued with a measure of plausibility that the single man

with sight in a country of the blind is a gibbering idiot for he would be the only odd person out of step; from a philosophical point of view, he is a king and quite rightly so.

This is what distinguishes philosophy from science: Science seeks at every crucial point to eliminate the individual scientist and replace him with procedure and evidence. These together make the theoretical framework of a scientific discovery which a large body of scientists would accept. Thus science seeks only consensus while philosophy must seek to scrutinize consensus.

And then, I made an attempt to separate philosophical works which in my opinion are universalist from those which are culturalist orientated. I followed this distinction with the explanation that only those literature which have an affinity with an African culture and are also philosophical may be deemed to be properly within the ambit of African philosophy. So then, those which do not have anything in particular to do with an African culture but are philosophical are 'universalist or trans-culturalist'.

II. THE CONTRIBUTION OF SAGE-PHILOSOPHERS TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY.

In my discussion of sagacious reasoning, I tried to show that there is a logical relation between 'practical reason' and 'sagacity'. For, 'sagacity' is manifest only in those actions which enthuse 'practical reason' which is almost invariably acquired through time and so matures with age.

However, my concern here is not merely with the question how 'sagacity' is used. It is more, I think, with the problem how a sage may transcend the first-order commonsense level and so able to philosophize at the crucial second-order level. Where a sage remains at the initial first-order level, then he is a folk-sage.

A good example of this is the late revered old Dogon sage, Ogotemmel³. On the other hand, where a sage is able to distant or divorce himself from the shackles of the culture of his people and so philosophize at the second-order critical level, then he is a philosophic-sage. The three Kenya sages I have used in this Study qualify as philosopher-sages.

This distinction is all the more important to emphasize because of the inherent confusions and therefore misrepresentations discernible in the writings of certain critics of sage-philosophy.

Professor Peter Bodunrin's 'The Question of African Philosophy' ⁴ is a paradigm example of this type of criticism. This paper betrays, in my view, its author's inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that certain sages can and do as a matter of fact enthuse personal individual views as opposed to a mere recitation of 'Communal' ideas which are not authored by any particular individual.

But now, the fundamental question here is not merely whether this or that sage-philosopher is an 'African Plato'. The relevant question rather, I think, is whether the sage's contribution is sufficiently philosophical such that the effort provokes and generates further discussions and even controversies. This is, I believe, what the enterprise of philosophizing is all about.

It is useful, I think, in this context to remember that Thales, himself the first critical philosopher, is credited with the animistic view that all things are full of gods. He is not for this reason rejected but is in fact recognised as a sage-philosopher, being one of the seven sages of early Greece.

In modern times, there are philosophers and even hard-nosed scientists who also believe in superstitious entities and phenomena like the existence of God, the virgin birth and what nots.

It is opportune at this juncture, I think, to state that the research work already done here at Nairobi by Professor Oruka in highlighting the phenomenon of sage-philosophy made some initial contribution to the stimulation of my own interest in this new area of African philosophy. If, as I earnestly hope, the present Study helps to generate further discussions, then sage-philosophy will have made African philosophy a richer and fuller, not a poorer enterprise.

III. PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE

In the examination of the works of some foreign researchers, I have found the absence of a careful sifting of evidence except in some rather exceptional cases like the works of the British anthropologist, Professor E.E. Evans-Pritchard. No doubt, there is, here and there, the profusion of material which tend to blind readers to their uncritical use. Thus inconsistencies: the good, the bad and the indifferent are all lumped together to swell the various works.

However, this is not to be taken that I am suggesting that the problems facing the foreign researcher are not genuine ones. The point here is that some researchers do take the arrogant view of things that the language of the natives who form the object of their research can be understood only through the medium of their own concepts. But what they manage to do is

edit out the meaning of the natives. This kind of problem is the direct result of the difficulties into which the American, Mr. Martin Hollis plunged himself. But instead of admitting that his methodology was incoherent, he described the Yoruba as 'primitives'.⁵ Such is the attitude of those who first raise some dust and then complain they cannot see!

But now, even a researcher from within the culture of the actors too, has his own problems. These can be viewed from two perspectives: first, Quine has shown convincingly, I think, that in the case of radical translation where meaning must need be inferred from verbal behaviour, there is an element of inbuilt indeterminacy. Thus Quine insists:

Two men could be just alike in all their dispositions to verbal behaviour... yet the meanings or ideas expressed... could diverge radically, for the two men, in a wide range of cases⁶.

Secondly, however much a researcher may try to objectify his work by attempting to detach himself from the actions of the actors, he finds himself in a sort of quandry for, he is 'one of them' and so cannot, so to speak, jump out of his skin. He is thus 'culture bound'.

Equally, I believe that more problems are created than solved when some positivists argue for the use of

concepts which are universal and so objective for, no such concepts are possible. The other polar extreme is to argue for a cultural relativistic sort of solution in which attempts are made to posit different logics in a distinctive and perhaps self-justifying realm of discourse having its own standard of rationality. This, quite simply, will not do either.

My own resolution of this difficulty is a compromise or synthesis in which the researcher, whilst retaining his own concepts, learns the language and thereby gets to some grip with the concepts of the native actors. It may even be necessary for the researcher to modify or extend his own concepts in order to accommodate those of the actors. For, it is crucial that in any interpretation or explanation, the meanings and intentions of the native actors are not lost or discarded.

One very final point: It is my belief that African philosophers will increasingly find in time, I think, that more attention to Sage-Philosophy repays its effort. This has been my own experience in this Study.

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4. P.O. Bodunrin, 'The Question of African Philosophy', in Philosophy, 56, 1981.
5. See note 16 under Chapter One above.
6. W.V.O. Quine, Word and Object. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960, page 26.

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