

## **BOOK REVIEW I**

**NAME OF BOOK:** African Philosophy: An Ontologico – Existential Hermeneutic Approach To Classical And Contemporary Issues

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### **Introduction**

Holistically speaking, philosophy is an all encompassing enterprise by all standards and spheres of life. It is a pattern of thinking guided by critical reason and logic about reality. Etymologically it is known as the love of wisdom. Therefore, African philosophy is the pattern of reflecting on African reality relying on the elements of reason and logic but the reality remains an African reality. In this work, the researcher shall review the book on schedule.

### **An Overview of the Work**

It is not gainsaid that like the Western philosophy which has no definitive definition, African philosophy is also caught up in such situation. However there could variety of definitions with keen concern to African philosophy. This notion was however stated in the chapter of this piece. It is talked about the controversies that arose whether there is anything like the African philosophy, and it was finally resolved that there is. The author made mention of some stimulating factors that brought about the African philosophy: racism, slave trade, and colonialism. Emphases were made with regards to the Africanness and philosophiness of African philosophy and the locus of it. The hermeneutic approach essentially stressed on the meaningful interpretation given by the Africans on the concept of being and reality. The chapter 3 explained vividly the various trends in African philosophy. These trends are what he termed as ‘schools of thought’ or ‘movements’. There are as follows: Universalist trend (based on applying universal principles), Ethno – philosophy (based on particular reality), Eclectic trend (combination of both Universalist and particularistic trends), national idealist trend (based on politics and struggle for emancipation). There are others like sage philosophy, hermeneutic trend. The source of African philosophy according to the author is the raw materials of which African philosophy is gotten. Among such are: works of professional African philosophers, proverbs, myths, names, languages, songs, folk tales, symbols and the likes of others. In the aspect of cosmology (science

of the universe), the Africans have their peculiar conception, perception and contemplation about the cosmos. And try to look for meaning. The universe comprises both the physical and spiritual dimensions. This same chapter also gave remarks on God and his attributes (uniqueness, creator, oneness, king etc), divinities (primordial and deified) both in a universal and particular sense. It is enumerated some African proofs of God's existence such as contingency, eternity etc. Akin to the Western philosophy, African philosophy has its own paradigms. It has for instance the Ancient period as documented by historians (3000 – 300 BC), dating back to the North African Egypt. The Medieval period is between 2 and 7 AD, also North Africa. And the later part of the medieval era between 10 and 15 century in Arobo – Islamic. The Modern period is also from the 15<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Also the contemporary period is from 21<sup>st</sup> century till date. In the area of method, two questions were observed in dealing with the methods to be employed: the question of written and oral tradition; and the question of collective and individual philosophy. Some held that it is not African philosophy since it is not written. Others held also that it must be collective ideas. This chapter vehemently discouraged such impressions. In the problem of language, Africans were concerned about the particular language that could be employed that would be suitable for doing philosophy. It was admonished that it would be better if it is done in the various African languages in which the people understand since it would reveal the structure of reality. Freedom as stressed in this book is viewed as an enterprise of communalism. It relates the effect of the community giving existence and liberty to its individual. The idea of community does not kill the individual's freedom. Also since God and nature punishes men based on wrong done or reward based on good done, it follows therefore that we are responsible for our action and hence free. He made mention about destiny and freedom. Ethics is a scientific study of morality. It aimed at the African perspective of right and wrong and the way she enforce its judgment or moral behavior and conduct; and see to it that there is balance between the human activities with that of the spirit world. In doing so, the African people believe the norms are preserved. Africans give ontological judgment to situation; more so, any act done either good or bad has a resultant effect on the community. Life is seen as the highest good, and without it nothing is and ever would be. It is the prime principle of being and given by God. It is something everlasting since it continues in the world beyond.

Chapter 13 tried to relate the concepts of evil, suffering and pain in the African world view. Through the Igbo perspectives, he averred that suffering is seen as another dimension of evil. He also gave the origin and approaches on evil: cosmological optimistic, human destiny etc. the issue of globalization has been negatively judged. The author gave a historical account of it though with no specified dates; and argued whether it is a process or a product? Being according to the Bantu people is seen as 'force'; and stressed on the quantity and quality of this force. The categories of being

were mentioned, for instance: muo (spirit), mmadu (human), anu (animal), ebe (space), oge (time) etc. the chapter 16 explained the concept of reincarnation, that for the African people it is a partial reincarnation and never a full one like that of the Western view. To them it is just the attributes of the ancestors found in someone; hence the identity of the individual is not hampered. Differences were made with regard to ogbanje or abiku and reincarnation. Time in the African opinion holds a paramount importance and dimension. Mbiti defined it as “a composition of events which have occurred, those that taking place now and those which are immediately to occur”. Time is divided into potential and actual time. It is never lineal but cyclic – everything repeats itself. The principle of causality in the African metaphysics is somewhat similar to the western aspect. Everything in the universe has a resultant cause, link and effect, directly or indirectly. And this principle binds the creator (original cause) to the creature (effect). The African man doesn't subscribe to the concept of change. Extraordinary events are what the Africans are concerned with. God is the ontological cause. There is also the functional cause in the African world view. In the field of science which is the study of knowledge, concrete evidences were given on the African contribution and impacts on science. For instance, medicine was strongly practiced and improved by the ancient Egypt, mathematics, astronomy; engineering enterprises (metals, alloys, and tools) were in vogue in Africa. Democracy as described by the author is a coinage from the Greek words ‘Dmos’ – ‘people’ and ‘kratein’ – ‘rule’. It is the power of the people. According to the Yoruba political organization, there is only one authority – Alaafin, and several councils of heads: the obgoni, Are-ona, and Aremor. This is the structure of the Yoruba government. He also enumerated that of the Igbo people which include the nuclear family, patrilineage umunna), the maximal lineage and the village group assembly. In essence, and as observed by the author, there exist traces of check and balances in the system of government in the African democracy. Decisions are reached through discursions, consultation, dialogue and compromise. And the perspective of every lineage is represented. African Philosophy has greatly given her quotas to nation development, by forming the human mind, by moving from theological dimension to scientific dimensions of interpretations and discoveries. It addresses concrete issues and helped in the mental decolonization of the African, stirred up the quest for emancipation. Evaluation of ideologies, critiques on cultures and promotion of high thinking, values, and national unity are on the run.

### **A Constructive Criticism on the Piece**

- It is apparent and unfortunate that this work has no evidence of in-depth research into several ethnic worldviews on philosophy. It is however less culture – sensitive. Most of the perspectives employed in conveying information were mostly from the Igbo and Yoruba worldviews.

Innovations should be made, using other tribes' perceptions interchangeably in certain subject matters.

- Also there are certain chapters in the book that ought to be fused together to make just a chapter instead of separating them. For instance chapter 2: the ontologico - existential hermeneutic approach; and chapter 3: trends in African philosophy. Likewise chapters 8 and 9: the problems of methodology and language respectively, should have been merged or juxtaposed as one single chapter each.
- Furthermore, I observed that the author's voice is not heard and felt much in this book. Majority of the statements are ideas, contributions, perspectives of other people; and these tend to swallow up the views of the author about the subject matter. I recommend that more of your expressions and propositions should be seen in your work and that other people's views should come occasionally and sporadically when beckon on.
- Having gone through this work I spotted some unaddressed issues with particular reference to the branches of African philosophy. In my opinion, I suggest that at least one or if possible three chapters should be set aside to buttress the African perspectives on the three (3) branches of African philosophy so that full grapes could be attained. Only an aspect of metaphysics: Causation was given a chapter. The African political philosophy was not to a considerable length discussed or emphasized also. It was only a system of government - democracy that was looked upon.

### **Commendations/Conclusion**

At this juncture, with utmost sense of appreciation I wish to commend that this great work has really contributed to the pool of knowledge in the known of academics. It has gone to certain reasonable extent to draw people even the indigenous Africans out from the pit of pitiable ignorance. At least people can now walk with his fellowmen in independence ease to say there is ever an African philosophy and always will be. This book has also contributed its quotas by defending the notion that Africans too have rationale, we have consciousness; the author also created a platform for propagating the wealth and pride philosophical endowment of the African with raised shoulders. It is on this basis, I find some convergent points between the western and African philosophy. Though there are some disparities, in any case, philosophy which studied under the particular culture of the people involved, likewise African philosophy is the African own worldview and

perspectives on philosophy; and we should not be denied of the right. That is why western philosophy is western in nature because there are the people of the west, Asian philosophy is Asian because it is done in structural settings of their culture; hence the locus of African philosophy is African either by geographical settings, by being indigenous people or by affiliation.

Finally, on a general note, I feel this wonderful piece has actually stung Africans and even foreigners to the consciousness, that Africans are never dead intellectually and otherwise. In fact, it has defeated the bias and sentimental notions held by most western thinkers and even some indigenous Africans on the phenomenological existence of African philosophy. I also commend the dexterous style, the simplicity in expression and clarity in that permeates through those expressions in a précised manner. I would not fail to assert that as an individual I have been enlightened richly about the African proverbs and what they stand for and so I could deduce that “a child who knows both the basis or kpim of his culture has not only justified the dowry paid on his mother, in addition he can never be lost in a foreign land. At this point I say Dalu.