



The Rootedness of African Metaphysics in African Philosophy

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Abstract

For the Africans, the reason for the physical is the spiritual. Consequently, the African ontological notion of the interminglingness, interpermeability, intertwiningness and the interpenetrability of the spiritual (metaphysical) and the physical world seems to becloud the whole range of an African man's world view. It is, therefore, in the explication of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence that the issue of metaphysics emerged. An African is by nature religious and as such does not admit the disjointedness and departmentalization of the spiritual and the physical. Both is considered as nothing but the two sides of one and the same coin. It is on this backdrop that the researchers determined to explicate the rootedness of African metaphysics in African philosophy. The authors intend to achieve the purpose of the study via the methodological framework of reflective approach.

Keywords: Rootedness, African Philosophy, African metaphysics, Trends in African Philosophy, Hierarchy of being.

Introduction

The ontological conception of the interminglingness and interpermeability of the metaphysical and the physical world unavoidably affects the whole range of an African man's world view. Little wonder Onwuatuegwu, I. succinctly puts it that a people's manner of comprehending reality unavoidably influences their general attitude to life ^[1] When discussing African metaphysics, it is important to note that the knowledge of African Philosophy leads to that of African metaphysics. In other words understanding African philosophy means understanding African metaphysics. This is because from the philosophy of Africa comes the metaphysics of Africa. This notion or believe of an African philosophy has led to questions like; do Africans have philosophy that is peculiar and particular to them? If yes, what is the content of such philosophy? These however, directly or indirectly questions the existence of African metaphysics. These and many other questions has directly or indirectly been raised over the years regarding African Metaphysics. In fact, the subject African Philosophy or Metaphysics indirectly became a subject for debate during the periods of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the colonization of the blacks (Africans).

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Little wonder, Wole Soyinka convincingly postulated that underdevelopment in Africa is chiefly the byproduct of the double barrel evils of colonization and slavery perpetuated by the western world^[2] Consequently, one could doubtlessly and rightly say that the major ideology which made the obnoxious and dastardly dehumanization was the misconstrued idea that Africans are irrational and, hence, less human. This implies that Africans are not as rational and cannot be more rational as the other human beings of other races order than Africa. Invariably, Africa is considered by some of the Western thinkers as a dark continent.^[3] Hence, in the words of L. Jarosz, therefore, Africa was considered as, a primeval, bestial, reptilian, or female entity to be tamed, enlightened, guided, opened, and pierced by white European males through western science, Christianity, civilization, commerce, and colonialism.^[4]

Furthermore, some others had the idea that perhaps the lack of literature among the traditional Africans, resulted to their rational inability to have an indigenous systematic thoughts (philosophy).^[5] This led some scholars who stood on the existing foundation of these ideologies to deny the fact that there is the possibility of any philosophy in Africa, which also implies the denial of African metaphysics. However, this discussion is aimed at bringing out some understanding of the contexts of African metaphysics through the knowledge of African philosophy.

The Context of African Metaphysics

Although there is a theory or notion that philosophy began in Africa. However, the African in this context is not the black-skinned persons of the African continent as the debate on the existence or nonexistence of philosophy in Africa in the periods of the slave trade and colonialism bordered; which according to Celestine Mbaegbu are “**the inhabitants of the South of the Sahara**”^[6] The African in this context refers to Africans in general with respect to their unique cultural practices. In this regard, it can be said that African metaphysics are the metaphysical treatises unique to the tribes in Africa. In other words, the notion of African metaphysics refers to the cultural uniqueness of the people of Africa. Going further, the African Philosophy strongly assumes the existence of a Metaphysics that is distinctly and particularly African. That which reflects the African universe and African reality, just as there is Western, Eastern or Jewish metaphysics, which is unique to them and has their characteristics. This is what characterizes African metaphysics, the uniqueness of the different cultural practices and beliefs of the various tribes in Africa. However, there are other ways through which African metaphysics can be understood through philosophical knowledge. These are regarded as the trends or schools of thought in African philosophy.

The Gradual and the Systematic Development of African Philosophy

There are trends in African philosophy. These trends are as a result of the controversy surrounding the pressing question with regards to what constitute the existence of African philosophy and the ground on which it should be judged, as some philosophers attempted to deny Africans of the existence of any philosophy in Africa, thereby also denying the existence of metaphysics or metaphysical concepts in Africa. As a way of responding, in order to prove that Africans have philosophy and not just philosophy but that which is peculiar to Africans, hence the trends, which are also known as the schools of thought in African philosophy. In a paper presented at an international symposium in memory of Dr. William A. Amo by Professor Odera Orika, he identified four trends. These four trends according to Egbeke Aja can also be called “**approaches in current African philosophy**”.^[7] These includes: Ethno Philosophy, Philosophical Sagacity, Nationalistic Ideological Philosophy and Professional Philosophy.

These four trends has served as a guide to understanding African philosophy, and in turn, the understanding of African metaphysics.

1. Ethno Philosophy

The term ethno philosophy was used by Pauline Hountondji to describe or ascribe the works of those sociologists, ethnographers and philosophers who presented the collective worldview of Africans, their proverbs, myths and traditions as philosophy. In this, ethno-philosophers tried to present a world system of thought of Africa in general, “rather than seeing philosophy as a body of logically argued thoughts of individuals”^[8] They view African philosophy as a thought that is communal in nature, owing to some unique features found in different African communities. However, some writers on ethno philosophy, like Placid Temples, J. S. Mbiti, L. S. Senghor amongst others has buttressed on the present state of Africa in general in relation to the past, and have tabled their concern to rediscover the original African ideas which to them has been influenced by foreign ideas. This rediscovery they believe can serve in rebuilding independent and secure African philosophy, which by implication means the rebuilding of African metaphysics. In line with this, they suggested the examination of African traditional communal way of living, the African morals and the African religious beliefs and practices. Following these, they hold, could lead to the discovery and rediscovery of African philosophy, hence African metaphysics.

2. Philosophical Sagacity

In this approach to understanding African philosophy or metaphysics are philosophers who believe that

examining the traditions and customs of Africa in order to understand African philosophy or metaphysics is not actually necessary? They sought to recognize those in the society who are known for their wisdom and wise sayings, whether dead or alive. The purpose for this, is to show that being educated is not an actual condition for philosophical thinking or thoughts and also to present the fact that there are critical thinkers in Africa whose thoughts and judgments are born out of deep reasoning and insight rather than customs and traditions. These thoughts, when examined carefully, can lead to the understanding of African philosophy or African metaphysics.

3. Nationalistic Ideological Philosophy

In this approach are African philosophers like Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Julius Nyerere and Sedar Senghor, whose works attempted to bring about a new and unique African political thought which can be based on the traditional African communal live and family-hood. This is because to them, true freedom must result to true mental freedom. Therefore, to be truly free, African political ideologies must be unique to Africans. In order to achieve this, the philosophy of Africa must be understood through the traditional African communal live and family-hood, hence the understanding of African metaphysics.

4. Professional Philosophy

This school of thought, views philosophy from two senses: the loose sense and the strict sense. From the loose sense, it considers the practice of philosophy as everyone's affair, while from the strict sense, philosophy is considered as a professional activity and as such, it can only consider those who practice philosophy professionally as philosophers. In other words, professional philosophy only focuses on those who practice philosophy on the professional level. That is why to them, African philosophy is that, done by African philosophers in any area of philosophy. Furthermore, they hold that for any thought to be seen as philosophical, criticism and argument must be involve because it characterizes philosophical thoughts. Again to them, philosophical meaning must be the same in all cultures. However, the method of arriving at any philosophical thought may be based on the culture in which the philosophy is gotten. In other words, gaining African philosophy or metaphysics can be based on studying the African culture(s). It is important to note that this four trends as earlier mentioned, are concern with development and understanding of African philosophy or metaphysics. Aside the above mentioned, African metaphysics can also be understood by looking into the African notion and hierarchy of being.

African Hierarchical Notion of Being

Ontologically, Africans think in hierarchical categories. This implies that Africans believe on the existence of being is hierarchy. In other words, African metaphysical belief is in hierarchical structure. That is why in Bantu philosophy according to Placid Temples, being is hierarchical, and at the apex of this arrangement of being is God, whom he considered the Supreme Being, followed by Spirit of ancestors, human being, animals and plant. All these according to Placid is the hierarchical structure of being. Furthermore, to Temples, this beings can either increase or decrease, that is, the lower beings communicating with the highest Being (God) and in turn, the highest communicating with the lower to the lowest. By implication of referring to God as the highest Being, it means that God is the Supreme Being in the hierarchy of beings. According to B. Abanuka in his book titled; **Philosophy and the Igbo World**, he referred to God (chukwu in Igbo) as **“the Being that possesses all ontological characteristics without exception, the Being that embraces all the fullness of reality”**.^[9] Also in his book titled **A History Of African Philosophy**, B. Abanuka stated that **“Ptahhotep conceives God as the Supreme Being...God is the giver of every good gift; in all things, man should strive to please God...”**.^[10] This can be said to be a part of Africans ontological notion of beings.

Conclusion

Conclusively, from the forgoing it can be said that African metaphysics exist and is found in the African philosophy formed by the African culture, morals, myths and traditions. To deny this, is to deny Africans the capacity for reflection, which is naturally given to man. Therefore, in order to better understand the metaphysics of Africa, there is need to understand the culture, morals, myths and traditional beliefs of Africa. This is because, on these, rest the better understanding and appreciation of African philosophy, hence the understanding of African metaphysics. Consequently, in African Ontology the physical and metaphysical, spiritual and material worlds interpenetrate and interwoven with one another. The separation is not necessarily spatial but meaningfully a dimensional. They are like two sides of one and the same reality.

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