

Introduction to African Philosophy

PHI 207



University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development
Version 1.0 ev1

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General Editor: Prof. Bayo Okunade

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre

University of Ibadan,
Nigeria

Telex: 31128NG

Tel: +234 (80775935727)

E-mail: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng

Website: www.dlc.ui.edu.ng

Vice-Chancellor's Message

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka

Vice-Chancellor

Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

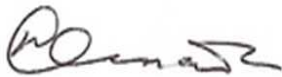
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre’s provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bayo Okunade', written in a cursive style.

Professor Bayo Okunade

Director

Course Development Team

Content Authoring	Amaechi, Udefi Ph.D., P.G.D.E. M.I.L.R
Content Editor	Prof. Remi Raji-Oyelade
Production Editor	Dr. Gloria O. Adedoja
Learning Design & Technologist	Folajimi Olambo Fakoya
Managing Editor	Ogunmefun Oladele Abiodun
General Editor	Prof. Bayo Okunade

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About this course manual

Introduction to African Philosophy PHI 207 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre are structured in the same way, as outlined below.

How this course manual is structured

The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- If the course is suitable for you.
- What you will already need to know.
- What you can expect from the course.
- How much time you will need to invest to complete the course.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- Study skills.
- Where to get help.
- Course assignments and assessments.
- Margin icons.

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Session outcomes.
- Core content of the Study Session with a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography

Your comments

After completing Introduction to African Philosophy we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

Course Overview

Welcome to Introduction to African Philosophy PHI 207

As an introductory course, this course attempts a brief historical account of the circumstances that gave birth to the discipline of African Philosophy. The course also presents the core, divergent, methodological approaches to African Philosophy.

Description of the major trends and orientations in contemporary African Philosophy is also given. These trends include: ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy, professional philosophy, hermeneutic-narrative philosophy. The course is capped with discussions on ethics, metaphysics, religion and cross-cultural comparison.

Course outcomes

Upon completion of Introduction to African Philosophy PHI 207 you will be able to:



Outcomes

- *explain* the nature of African Philosophy.
- *explain* the approaches to African Philosophy.
- *appraise* the features of different philosophical trends in Africa.
- *explain* the importance of language in human affairs.
- *discuss* the reasons why African scholars are worried about the language of African literature.
- *discuss* the relationship between philosophy and postmodernism.

Timeframe



How long?

This is a 15 week course. It requires a formal study time of 45 hours. The formal study times are scheduled around online discussions / chats with your course facilitator / academic advisor to facilitate your learning. Kindly see course calendar on your course website for scheduled dates. You will still require independent/personal study time particularly in studying your course materials.

How to be successful in this course



As an open and distance learner your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days, where you had onsite education. You will now choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities.

Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself in areas such as essay planning, coping with exams and using the web as a learning resource.

We recommend that you take time now—before starting your self-study—to familiarize yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the web. A few suggested links are:

- <http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/resources/studyskill.pdf>

This is a resource of the UIDLC pilot course module. You will find sections on building study skills, time scheduling, basic concentration techniques, control of the study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis and memory skills (“remembering”).

- http://www.ivywise.com/newsletter_march13_how_to_self_study.html

This site provides how to master self-studying, with bias to emerging technologies.

- <http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php>

Another “How to study” web site with useful links to time management, efficient reading, questioning/listening/observing skills, getting the most out of doing (“hands-on” learning), memory building, tips for staying motivated, developing a learning plan.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing these web links were active. If you want to look for more, go to www.google.com and type “self-study basics”, “self-study tips”, “self-study skills” or similar phrases.

Need help?



As earlier noted, this course manual complements and supplements PHI 207 at UI Mobile Class as an online course.

You may contact any of the following units for information, learning resources and library services.

Distance Learning Centre (DLC)

University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Tel: (+234) 08077593551 – 55
(Student Support Officers)
Email: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng

Head Office

Morohundiya Complex, Ibadan-Ilorin Expressway, Idi-Ose, Ibadan.

Information Centre

20 Awolowo Road, Bodija, Ibadan.

Lagos Office

Speedwriting House, No. 16 Ajanaku Street, Off Salvation Bus Stop, Awuse Estate, Opebi, Ikeja, Lagos.

For technical issues (computer problems, web access, and etcetera), please send mail to webmaster@dlc.ui.edu.ng.

Academic Support



A course facilitator is commissioned for this course. You have also been assigned an academic advisor to provide learning support. The contacts of your course facilitator and academic advisor for this course are available at onlineacademicsupport@dlc.ui.edu.ng

Activities



This manual features “Activities”, which may present material that is NOT extensively covered in the Study Sessions. You will be provided with answers to every activity question. Therefore, your emphasis when working the activities should be on understanding your answers. It is more important that you understand why every answer is correct.

There are different forms of activities in this manual, ranging from reading activities, case studies, discussion activities. The use of activities is particularly based on learning outcomes and nature of content. Some Study Sessions comes with discussion topics. You may discuss the Study Sessions at respective discussion boards on course website.

You may see dates for active discussion with tutor on course schedule. This course schedule is available on the course website.

Assignment



Assignment

This manual also comes with tutor marked assignments (TMA). Assignments are expected to be turned-in on course website. You may also receive TMAs as part of online class activities. Feedbacks to TMAs will be provided by your tutor in not more than 2-week expected duration.

Schedule dates for submitting assignments and engaging in course / class activities is available on the course website. Kindly visit your course website often for updates.

Assessments



Assessments

There are two basic forms of self assessment in this course: in-text questions (ITQs) and self assessment questions (SAQs). Feedbacks to the ITQs are placed immediately after the questions, while the feedbacks to SAQs are at the back of manual.

Bibliography



Reading




For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources at the end of this course manual; these may be books, articles or websites.

Getting around this course manual

Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

			
Activity	Assessment	Assignment	Case study
			
Discussion	Group Activity	Help	Outcomes
			
Note	Reflection	Reading	Study skills
			
Summary	Terminology	Time	Tip

PART I

History, Definition and Methodology

Introduction to Part One

In this series of sessions in this part, our main aim will be to attempt a general definition of the course called *African Philosophy*. As an introductory course, we shall attempt a brief historical account of the circumstances that gave birth to the discipline. In the third session, our presentation of the core, divergent, methodological approaches to African Philosophy is meant to help you to further appreciate the rather “shaky” definition of the course, which you must have encountered in the second session.

Study Session 1

In the Beginning: Africa and Europe

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will review the nature of the initial encounter between Africans and Europeans.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 *discuss* the nature of the initial encounter between Africans and Europeans.
- 1.2 *Critique* Eurocentricism.

1.1 Early Contact between Africa and Europe

Based on the information available to us from many publications on African history, we know that the earliest recorded encounters between Europeans and African kingdoms were peaceful and even friendly. The earliest recorded encounters took place in the 1400SE. And during this time, Europeans and the Africans engaged in commerce. They even exchanged diplomatic counsels, that is, the Africans and the Europeans exchanged or learnt ideas about leadership from each other. What is more, they related as equals. The Europeans (that traded with the Africans) did not think that the Africans were unwise, savages or anything inferior to themselves or their fellow citizens back in Europe. Indeed, these Europeans said very good things about how well things worked in some of the places they visited, such as the Bini, Dahomey and the Ashanti. They even compared the fine political organization of each of those African Kingdoms with the Roman Papacy (See Eze, 1997:6, Makumba, 2007: 37-43).

But before too long, something happened to change this cordial relationship between Africa and the West. Let us go over to the next subtitle and talk about it, and its consequences.

ITQ

Question

- The earliest encounter between Europe and Africa can be traced to the _____.
 - a. 1960s.
 - b. 1800s.
 - c. 1400s.

d. 1670s.

Feedback

- From the records that have been supplied by historians, we can trace the encounter and relationship between Europe and Africa to the 1400s. Thus, the right option is C.

1.2 Eurocentricism

European Ethnocentrism The view that Europe and everything that comes from that part of the world is the best, most important and perhaps, most desirable.

“Eurocentricism” or what Abiola Irele calls “**European ethnocentrism**” (See Hountondji, 1996:12), is defined as the view that Europe and everything that comes from that part of the world is the best, most important and perhaps, most desirable. In short, it means that only the Western world is entirely wholesome and human. But, before we say more about this startling notion or standpoint, let us talk briefly about how or why the Europeans that regarded Africans with utmost respect (as we saw earlier), could possibly come to embrace Eurocentricism.

The question that you may want to ask is what really happened to change Western views about Africa and indeed other civilizations? Now, let us note that the United States of America is an extension of Europe. At one point, European explorers “discovered” America or what was then called the New World. Europeans discovered enormous natural resources in America, and they carted away much of these to Europe. But soon many Europeans began settling in America and with that the desire to plant arable crops on the very fertile American soil. With this, plantations began to sprout and develop in America. And “as the plantations in the Americas developed ... Afro-European demands shifted from raw materials to human labour...” (Eze 1997:6). This means that because the Europeans needed people to work for them at their plantations in America, they decided to capture Africans and take them into slavery to work for them.

Perhaps, in order to justify their ignoble act, the Europeans shifted “their literary, artistic, and philosophical characterisations of Africans” (Ibid). Some notable Western scholars did more than their own fair share in providing philosophical and literary reasons to justify both the enslavement of Africans and colonialism. Any such writing is usually regarded as “Eurocentric” or embodying European ethnocentric ideas. In the next sub-section, we shall identify some of the central figures, who defended Eurocentricism, and discuss their central views.

1.2.1 Some Defenders of European Ethnocentrism

From the foregoing in this section, we saw that European ethnocentrism or eurocentricism is a concept used to denote any view, which emphasizes that the white man or the European/American is a superior human being. Here, we elaborate on this definition, while drawing special attention to the Eurocentric views of David Hume, Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel and Lucien Levy-Bruhl.

ITQ

Question

- According to Abiola Irele, what is the other name that can be given to eurocentrism?

Feedback

- The other name that Abiola Irele gives to eurocentrism is European ethnocentrism.

According to Lucius Outlaw, eurocentricism is “a cultural complex of attitudes, sentiments, customs, habits, ideas, ideals, norms and practices that motivated, informed and legitimated the social and cultural, economic and political orderings of life, of peoples.” (2003:157). For Outlaw, eurocentricism is a “complex,” a way of life, a way of looking at the world that encouraged the European to believe in “White racial Supremacy,” “a capitalist political economy with universalist aspirations” and “a desire to dominate the globe.”

What Lucius Outlaw is saying is simply that eurocentricism is the view that Europe can and should conquer and rule the rest of the world because European culture, political and economic system, as well as civilisation are the best ones and should be emulated by the rest of the human race.

David Hume (1711-1776)

David Hume was a renowned Scottish philosopher. He was greatly respected in his time. And he is one of those European scholars who insisted that the Blackman was inferior to the Whiteman.

According to Hume,

I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, or even any individual eminent in action or specialization. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the Whites such as the ancient GERMANS, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them... such a uniform and constant difference could not happen... if nature had not made original distinction betwixt these breeds of men (Eze, 1997:7).

What Hume is simply saying is that the Africans are very different from Europeans. While Europeans represented the “proper” humanity, Africans were inferior or sub-humans. And what is worst, Africans have always being inferior and in the opinion of Hume, will continue to be so. To cap it all, this great “difference” between the Whites and the Blacks was “natural.”

Of course, you can easily see that the above claims are, to say the least, outrageous and totally untrue. But, they were accepted by almost everybody back then in Europe and further propagated by other highly revered scholars in the West.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Immanuel Kant is regarded as the greatest modern philosopher; yet he is one of those who simply accepted the views expressed by Hume above. Not only that, he contributed more to Hume's terrible account about the black race. According to Kant, the White race is the standard race, the superior race with which the importance or otherwise of other races are to be measured. In Kant's view, the black race counted for only sheer stupidity. In an infamous passage, Kant was cited as making the following shocking statement: "This man was black from head to toe, a clear proof that what he said was stupid" (Eze, 1997:7). Now you will agree with me that this was a shocking comment to be made by a highly intelligent philosopher. But again, he was listened to by the Whites.

G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831)

Hegel, like Kant, was a German philosopher. Perhaps it could be said that he did more than the aforementioned philosophers in providing the philosophical basis for the abuse of the peoples of other cultures, especially, Africans in the nineteenth century. His writings also provided the immediate tonic for European expansion and colonial adventure (Irele, 1996:12).

According to Hegel, for any society or civilization to be regarded as important, then it must be part of world history, or governed by reason. Now, in Hegel's incorrect view, European civilization is the only one that was fully part of world history, and it is governed by reason. For Hegel, Africa, in particular, has no history, and its peoples cannot think reasonably, have no laws, religion or political order. And for this reason, Africans deserved to become slaves to the Europeans and also to be colonized. As a matter of fact, Hegel states that it would be better for Africa to be colonized. It was in the interest of Africans to be colonized by Europe so that, Africans will learn "moral education," imbibe "human" culture and mores. Only when this is completed would Africa then become members of world history and Universal Reason (Eze, 1997:8).

Now, Hegel said all these things for selfish reasons. He wanted Africans to be forced to work for his own people. This is because capitalism as practiced in Europe then made many ordinary citizens to be very poor, and there was a need for people from other countries to work and enrich all those hungry Europeans.

It is therefore important that all of us should work hard to make our country and continent great in our own time. Some of us are still rushing to Europe and America to work for peanuts. By so doing we indirectly continue to fulfil Hegel's wish by improving European/American economies at the detriment of ours back home.

Lucien Levy-Bruhl

Lucien Levy-Bruhl was a 20th century European anthropologist. He is remembered here because he carried further, what the earlier philosophers had started. Levy-Bruhl insisted that Africans possess a pre-logical mentality, as radically different from the highly developed mindset of the European (See Udefi, 2005:75). For Levy-Bruhl, Africans

simply can not think in abstract terms or understand how time and larger things in the universe operate. From the foregoing, we could state that Levy-Bruhl's work further provided the classical framework upon which the European colonialists related with Africans.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed various issues about the initial encounter of Africans and Europeans. We also appraised issues relating to eurocentricism.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ1.1. (tests Learning Outcomes 1.1 and 1.2)

From the outset, the relationship between Africa and Europe had been premised on bias. Discuss.

Bibliography



Reading

Makumba, M.M. (2007). *Introduction to African Philosophy*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa

Outlaw J.R., L.T. (2003). "Afrocentricity": Critical Considerations. in *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*. T.L. Lott and J. P. Pittman (eds.) Cambridge Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 155-167.

Study Session 2

Defining African Philosophy

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will give a general definition of “African Philosophy.” We will also discuss the scope and nature of African Philosophy.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 *analyse* possible definitions of African Philosophy.
- 2.3 *explain* the nature of African Philosophy.

2.1 What is African Philosophy?

The question “What is **African Philosophy**” is a meta-philosophical one. Meta-philosophical questions are questions that go beyond the main “things” or issues that philosophers reflect on. Meta-philosophical questions rather turn around as to whether those “main things” or “important issues” are really that important. Sometimes, meta-philosophical questions are posed in order to cast doubts on the existence of the subject called “philosophy” itself! At other times, meta-philosophical questions might arise simply as a result of a dispute or quarrel between philosophers as to the best approach or “methodology” to be used in doing philosophy.

Truly, the problem of defining African Philosophy is meta-philosophical because most definitions that have been put forward are based on what the author thinks should be the important thing(s) or the content of African Philosophy. Other definitions favoured by some writers are chosen based on what they consider the best approach or methodology to be used in African Philosophy. Also, as we will discover later, most definitions of African Philosophy have been developed by those who accept them so that such definitions have become the framework for “a school of thought” a “trend” or “an orientation” in African Philosophy. We’ll explain this some more later. But for now, let us examine some of the definitions of African Philosophy.

ITQ

Question

- What are meta-philosophical questions?

Feedback

- They are questions that go beyond the main issues that philosophers are concerned with and at times concern themselves with the necessity of these so-called main issues that philosophers are concerned with.

2.1.1 Possible Definitions of African Philosophy

African Philosophy as the Logic of Oral Tradition

One of the earliest popular definitions of African Philosophy is the one that states that understanding why the traditional Africans did or said the things they did will go a long way to “bringing out” or “unraveling” the *philosophy* behind such words and actions. Why did our forefathers formulate certain proverbs, idioms and wise-sayings? Did they have *reasons* that informed their beliefs about certain things, say, in religion and agricultural practices? Were story-telling and the folklores meant to pass across certain values and moral beliefs that would guide individuals and society?

The clergyman, John S. Mbiti, is one of those who thought that “Philosophical system of different African peoples... may be found... in (the) religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics and morals of the society concerned.” For this reason, Mbiti concludes that “African Philosophy”... (can be defined as) the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life” (Mbiti, 1969:2).

African Philosophy as the Dispute between the Traditionalists and the Modernists

If we continue reading published books and articles on African Philosophy, we are likely to come to the conclusion that African Philosophy is after all the outcome of the disagreement between the **traditionalists** and the **modernists**. If you believe that, you won’t be very wrong. African Philosophy can indeed be understood as the “...philosophical reflection on, and analysis of African conceptual systems as was both undertaken by the traditionalists and the modernists” (Aja, 1999:89, Oladipo, 2000: 20-72).

But, you may want to know who the “traditionalists” and “modernists” are. To make it very simple, when contemporary African Philosophy began, following Fr. Tempels work in 1945, after some time, two major camps evolved. The first camp is composed of those who believed strongly that authentic African Philosophy could be uncovered, if we returned to our origins or our traditional past to look for it. Our search for authentic African Philosophy, they further argue, would be best done if we retrace our steps without the influence of foreign ideas and cultures. This first camp is usually referred to as the ‘traditionalists’ in African Philosophy. The second camp, known as the “modernists”, however rejects the position held by the traditionalists. The modernists simply say that the African society of today needs development. That development, they further complain, cannot be achieved if we rely on the beliefs of past traditional Africans because traditional African society was in their view,

erroneously guided by authoritarianism, religiosity and superstitions. For this reason, we should rather embrace science and technology. (Bodunrin, 1985:xi). We'll hear a lot more about this two camps in Part II.

Hint

There are **three** distinct definitions of African Philosophy to be found in this course. They are:

- a) **The traditionalists' definition:** Authentic African Philosophy lies in the past, for the sake of the present.
- b) **The modernists' position:** African Philosophy should encourage science and technology at the present, for the sake of the future.
- c) *African Philosophy is the outcome of the dispute between the traditionalists and the modernists.*

African Philosophy as "Text-Writing"

The last definition of African Philosophy that we will mention at present is the view, which says that African Philosophy is a collection of texts produced by African philosophers, as well as philosophical writings on Africa.

Note that even though we have three sub-titles on defining African Philosophy here, we have actually discussed five definitions of African Philosophy. Which of them will you accept as your best definition of African Philosophy?

2.2 Nature and Scope of African Philosophy

African Philosophy can be understood as derivable from traditional myths, folklores, story-telling, proverbs, religions and worldviews. This description, you'll recall, is the traditionalist view. On the other hand, African Philosophy can also be viewed as the philosophical works of professional African Philosophers.

The scope of African Philosophy has been disputed by many writers. But it will be accepted by many people that African Philosophy includes:

- a) texts written by African Philosophers,
- b) philosophical texts written by any African on Africa and,
- c) philosophical texts written by non-Africans about Africa.

ITQ

Question

- Who are the traditionalists and who are the modernists?

Feedback

- The traditionalists are those who believe that we can only discover the authentic African philosophy by going back to our roots and culture without any influence of foreign culture or ideas. The modernists are those who believe that what Africa needs is development and that it can only be achieved if we

embrace science and technology and not a religious embrace of our traditional values.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we focused on definition of African Philosophy. We explored different possible definitions of African Philosophy. We cap the session with a discussion on the nature and scope of African Philosophy.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ2.1. (tests Learning Outcomes 2.1 and 2.2)

Defining African philosophy is a difficult task. Discuss.

Bibliography



Reading

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Study Session 3

The Question of Methodology in African Philosophy

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will explore different approaches to African philosophy. These approaches include: traditional intellectual sage approach, particularist or relevance approach, universalist or pluralist approach, language methodology, conceptual decolonisation approach, and method of classification or periodization.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

3.1 Explain at least four approaches to African Philosophy.

3.1 Approaches to African Philosophy

There are at least six distinct approaches or methodologies in African Philosophy. They are:

- i. the traditional intellectual sage approach,
- ii. the particularist or relevance approach,
- iii. the universalist or pluralist approach,
- iv. the language methodology,
- v. conceptual decolonisation approach, and
- vi. the method of classification or periodization.

Let us discuss these approaches in turns.

3.1.1 Traditional Intellectual Sage Approach

The first approach or methodology adopted by African Philosophers that we shall mention here is what may be called the traditional intellectual approach. According to those who hold the view that this is the best approach to African Philosophy, all we need do is to go back to the African elders, hold discussions with them on philosophical matters, and then document such findings as African Philosophy (See Azenabor, 1994/95:69). This is because, according to Paul Radin who is a major supporter of this view, there was, and perhaps, there still is in existence "... an autochthonous intellectual class in traditional (African) society (Ibid; 68).

But some African Philosophers, especially the modernists or professional philosophers, have rejected this view for at least two inter-related reasons:

Philosophy is an individualistic task. This means that real philosophical opinions can only be expressed by one person. But the so-called traditional intellectual class in Africa merely repeats the popular community views. For this reason, such views cannot pass as real philosophy.

The professional African philosophers, like Peter Bodunrin, also argue that any serious philosophical work cannot be produced without writing. And since the traditional sages are not educated and do not write, they cannot possibly do philosophy.

But if we look carefully at these criticisms leveled against “the traditional intellectual sage approach, by Professional African Philosophers, we will see that this group may not be entirely correct. This is because:

- a) people in traditional society hold individual and different opinions about matters that concern them; and
- b) it is not true that people cannot think or philosophize if they cannot write.

Rather, in traditional societies, the ideas of great thinkers and philosophers are usually passed on as pithy sayings, proverbs and folklores.

3.1.2 Particularist or Relevance Approach

The professional philosophers represent the fourth trend in Odera Oruka’s classification of the various trends in African Philosophy. (We will talk more about Oruka and his four trends in African Philosophy in the next section). Now, within the professional fold, we can identify two different groups. And the two groups can be classified along their preferred approaches to African Philosophy. They are the “particularists” and “universalists” groups (Bello, 2004:263). Let us first discuss the particularist group, and then follow it up with the Universalists.

The particularists are interested in the relevance of African Philosophy to contemporary African situations and problems. They see African Philosophy as “coterminous with philosophical investigations having a special relevance to Africa” (Wiredu, 1996:149, cited by Bello, 2004:263). Bello further clarifies the particularist viewpoint. According to him, The particularists say that “no philosophy is African Philosophy unless it deals with a specific African theme, topic, or problem, for example, the Yoruba conception of the person, the Akan conception of truth ... the Luo concept of God, Igbo philosophy ...” and so on.

What the particularists or “relevance” group are simply saying is that African Philosophy should be done in such a way that it would be of direct relevance or importance to African societies. They may be right to some extent. After all, what will be the value of any philosophy if it does not help us to consciously re-examine the ideas we live by (Bello, 2004:264)? Again, we cannot pretend that some philosophical discussions like logic, ontology, Greek science and religion, and so on, can be said to

qualify as African philosophy. In fact, it doesn't help the development of African Philosophy for us to include such discussions in "African Philosophy," (See Bodunrin 1981, and Bello, 2004). Some members of the particularist group are Godwin Sogolo and Olusegun Oladipo, among others.

3.1.3 Universalist or Pluralist Approach

The Universalists or pluralists reject the viewpoint of the particularists. They argue that there are some things that are common in every philosophy— such as criticism, reconstruction, explanation and justification. We cannot therefore formulate a *special* brand of philosophy and name it "African Philosophy." This would be as funny as formulating "African Mathematics", "African Physics" or "African Chemistry".

Again, the Universalists insist, that Africa is part of the world. And being part of the world, other peoples' cultures, religions and worldviews have now penetrated Africa. We now have Christianity, Islam, urbanisation, industrialisation and globalisation as part and parcel of African reality. Apart from this, Africans are simply human beings, with the same biological make-up as other humans. So human problems are African problems, and African problems are human problems. There is no "pure" African or unique African situation or problem. For these reasons, the Universalists finally conclude that the best approach to African Philosophy is through "cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparisons" (Wiredu, 1996:149). Members of this group are Peter Bodunrin, OderaOruka, PualinHountondji, KwasiWiredu and A.G.A. Bello.

ITQ

Question

- Which of the following is not a proponent of the Universalist school?
 - a) Placid Tempels
 - b) Kwasi Wiredu
 - c) Odera Oruka
 - d) Peter Bodunrin

Feedback

- If you look at the options that you are given, you will discover that all of them but Placide Tempels are proponents of the Universalist school. He is the odd one out in the list.

3.1.4 Language Methodology or Approach

Another group of African Philosophers are more concerned with the language of African writers and philosophers. This group is worried about the very fact that African Philosophy is being done in English, French and other foreign languages. They argue that because of this, African Philosophy is not really African. And as a result of this too, many

Africans do not really understand African Philosophy, which means that in the end, African Philosophy does not really serve any useful purpose to us as it is far removed from our culture and environment. Therefore, the view of those who support the language approach is that we should make effort to domesticate foreign ideas and concepts, so that they would have real meaning to us and our environment. This we can do by translating foreign concepts and ideas into own languages. Concepts like democracy, rule of law, mind and body, appearance and reality, destiny, globalisation, etc., if translated into our indigenous languages, will have deeper meanings for us. Indeed, for some of those who support the language approach, Wiredu for example, if we translate certain concepts and ideas into our own languages, some of the controversies that surround them in Western philosophy will be discovered to have nothing to do with African cultures.

3.1.5 Conceptual Decolonization as an approach to African Philosophy

Closely related to the language approach, is the conceptual decolonization methodology. This group, which is again led by the Ghanaian-born foremost African Philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, is of the belief that African Philosophy will be done better if we are conceptually decolonized. But, what exactly is conceptual decolonisation? Now, we all know what colonisation means. Colonisation refers to the condition African countries found themselves when they were being ruled by European countries. Decolonization can take at least two ways— political and conceptual. Most African countries have achieved political decolonization or political freedom with independence. But conceptual decolonization has to do with abandoning “European mentality” or the view that anything European is better than those in Africa. This mental or conceptual decolonisation, it is argued, must begin from thinking philosophically and writing in our own indigenous languages. According to those who support the conceptual decolonisation approach, all we need do is to enrich and develop African languages for the purpose of science and technology and philosophising itself.

3.1.6 The Method of Classification or Periodization

Finally, there are those who insist on a “clear-cut reconstitution of African Philosophy”. For them, this can be done by dividing African Philosophy into periods or epochs. So, in this sense, we shall have ancient African Philosophy, modern African philosophy, and contemporary African Philosophy. According to the proponents, it is only when we understand African Philosophy in this way that we shall escape some of the controversies surrounding its existence and validity.

ITQ

Question

- Who is the foremost African philosopher on conceptual decolonization?

Feedback

- The foremost philosopher in this area is the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu.



Note

There are other approaches to African Philosophy, which have been discussed by C.S. Momoh (1985), but we have left out here. They are the method of “synthesis,” the method of “departmentalisation” among others. The ones we have discussed represent the major trends in African Philosophy.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we examined the six major approaches to African Philosophy. They are: The traditional intellectual sage approach, the particularist or relevance approach, the universalist or pluralist approach, the language methodology, conceptual decolonisation approach and the method of classification or periodization.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 3.1 (tests Learning Outcome 3.1.)

Discuss at least four approaches to African philosophy.

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PART II

Trends and Orientations in African Philosophy

Introduction to Part Two

You are welcome to the second main part of our Study Sessions on African Philosophy. In this part, there are five Study Sessions. Each of them describes in detail one of the major trends and orientations in contemporary African Philosophy. They are:

- Study Session Four: Ethnophilosophy
- Study Session Five: Philosophic Sagacity or Sage Philosophy
- Study Session Six: Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy
- Study Session Seven: Professional Philosophy
- Study Session Eight: Hermeneutic-Narrative Philosophy

Study Session 4

Ethnophilosophy

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will examine the concept and features of ethnophilosophy. We will also discuss criticisms that have been levelled against this trend.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 4.1 *explain* the features of ethnophilosophy.
- 4.2 *discuss* the criticisms of ethnophilosophy

4.1 What is Ethnophilosophy?

Ethno-philosophy The trend in African philosophy that focuses on the documentation of the mythical concepts, ritual practices, proverbs, and institutions of the different African ethnic groups

Ethnophilosophy is a trend in African philosophy focusing on the documentation of the mythical concepts, ritual practices, proverbs, and institutions of the different African ethnic groups (P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux, 1998: 450). As we already know, this trend was championed by Placide Tempels. His followers include other religious persons or theologians such as J.S. Mbiti, E. Bolaji Idowu and anthropologists like Marcel Griaule, Alexis Kagame and Robin Horton. According to K.A. Owolabi, the main aim of this group of scholars was to:

1. debunk Eurocentric views of such scholars as Hegel and Levy-Bruhl (that we studied earlier. You will recall that Hegel, Levy-Bruhl, among others, said that African peoples are incapable of thinking and reasoning properly like other human beings), and
2. make African mentality and culture understandable to the Western people, especially for the purpose of the colonizing project (Owolabi, 2000:13-14).

From Owolabi 2000, we can outline several features of ethnophilosophy as shown below.

Features of Ethnophilosophy

- An acceptance of the descriptive approach as the best method of extracting African Philosophical materials from the body of African folk beliefs, traditional African worldviews, their stories, songs and mythologies.
- A general belief that all African societies have the same culture.
- A desire to draw a sharp demarcation between African beliefs and ways of living, on the one hand, and European assumptions and lifestyles, on the other.
- Ethnophilosophy also thrives on the belief that philosophy in the “debased sense,” that is, philosophy in its simplest and common man’s view can pass as real philosophy.
- A sentimental and romantic attachment to the African past, so much so that criticisms of the cultural facts are completely avoided.
- A conception of philosophy as a communal project, rather than that of the individual. The belief among ethnophilosophers is that the “community wisdom” can pass as individual philosophy, or as rigorous and critical philosophy.

ITQ

Question

- Who championed the ethno-philosophy trend?

Feedback

- From what you have studied here, you will see that the answer is Placide Tempels.

4.2 Criticisms against Ethnophilosophy

Many people have attacked ethnophilosophy and its supporters. One of the most outstanding critics of ethnophilosophy is Paulin Hountondji, the man who is believed to have coined the word “ethnophilosophy” himself (although he denies this saying, Nkrumah had used it before him. See Hountondji, 1996: xxi-xxii). Hountondji’s critique of ethnophilosophy is that it pretends that a mere documentation of traditional African folklores world views and cultural practices can pass as philosophy. Indeed, for Hountondji, this mistake came about, in the first instance, because ethnophilosophers failed to make the necessary distinction between philosophy in its strict, critical and reflective sense, on the one hand, and its loose, ‘debased’ common man’s sense. Ethnophilosophers wrongly presented the debased common man’s view of philosophy as authentic African Philosophy.

For the purpose of easy understanding, let us itemize some of the major criticisms against ethnophilosophy:

- 1) The first main attack against ethnophilosophy follows from Hountondji's views above. It is said by the critics of ethnophilosophy that it seems "to be implying that Africans are only capable of practising the weak (or debased) form of philosophy and not the rigorous (critical) form of it" (Owolabi, 2000).
- 2) Ethnophilosophy has also been criticized for over-romanticising the African past. In other words, some people have criticized ethnophilosophers for writing as if our past was very glorious. After all, according to the critics of ethnophilosophy, that same African past traditional practices allowed only a few Europeans to carry away many of our able-bodied men and women into slavery – and later colonization. There is, therefore, a need to be critical of such African past beliefs and customs.
- 3) Another very serious attack on ethnophilosophy is the claim that ethnophilosophy is merely targeted at helping the Europeans to "obverse" the African mindset for the purpose of colonisation. In other words, ethnophilosophy does not actually favour Africans, since the idea is not to understand the African as a person worthy of a serious discourse about his culture and development (Hountondji, 1996; Van Niekerk, 1998).

In spite of all these attacks, let me say that ethnophilosophy did an enormous good to African Philosophy. This is because without ethnophilosophy, there wouldn't have been other trends in African Philosophy. After all, as Outlaw and Oruka have rightly observed, "... in its inception Tempels's work served ... a positive function. It challenged the common notion that the Africans were completely sterile in intellectual and moral productions of his own (Serequeberhan, 1991:18).

ITQ

Question

- Who is believed to have coined the term 'ethno-philosophy'?

Feedback

- From what you have studied here, the answer is Paulin Hountondji.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the meaning and features of ethnophilosophy. You learnt that it is a trend in African philosophy focusing on the documentation of the mythical concepts, ritual practices, proverbs, and institutions of the different African ethnic groups. We also discuss the criticisms against ethnophilosophy.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 4.1 (tests Learning Outcome 4.1).

Ethno-philosophy can best be defined as ideal. Discuss.

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Study Session 5

Philosophic Sagacity

Introduction

In the previous Study Session, we examined ethnophilosophy as a trend in African Philosophy. In this Study Session, we will devote our attention to philosophic sagacity, which is the second trend that came out in the debate concerning the existence of African Philosophy.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 *describe* Philosophic sagacity.
- 5.2 *appraise* the main tasks of Philosophic sagacity.
- 5.3 *discuss* the objections against Philosophic sagacity .

5.1 What really is Philosophic Sagacity?

Philosophic sagacity The view that we can discover individual African philosophers by interviewing some wise men in our local communities. The interview should be a dialogue concerning what everyone already believes in that community.

Philosophic sagacity is a trend in African Philosophy which claims that within the past and present African societies, there are wise persons especially elders, who not only understand the cultural beliefs of their respective local communities, but can also

1. subject such views to rigorous, systematic and critical consideration and, as such,
2. hold dissenting views about such cultural beliefs.

Put in a different way, philosophic sagacity is the view that we can discover individual African philosophers by interviewing some wise men in our local communities. The interview should be a dialogue concerning what everyone already believes in that community. Thus, on the one hand, Philosophic sagacity rejects ethnophilosophy and its view that African philosophy is the same thing as communal thoughts. On the other hand, Philosophic sagacity disagrees with professional philosophy because the latter insists on the view that literacy, documentation and universalism are the hallmarks of real philosophy (Oruka 1991, Aja, 1999: 93-94).

Hint

Philosophic sagacity was invented and made popular by Henry Odera Oruka, a Kenyan philosopher. The main aim of Philosophic sagacity was to reconcile the supporters of ethnophilosophy and their critics within the fold of the professional philosophers.

5.2 The Task of Philosophic Sagacity

The tasks of Philosophic sagacity, as set down by its supporters, are as follows:

1. To discover sages or wise men in African communities.
2. To dialogue with such sages in order to find out the general beliefs of their people.
3. Find out whether some of these sages may hold contrary views about what was generally believed.
4. Compare the views of sages in order to discover the true beliefs of the people.
5. Attempt to systematize the views of sages in a rigorous, philosophical manner.

ITQ

Question

- Who invented and made the idea of philosophic sagacity popular?

Feedback

- The answer to this is Odera Orika.

5.3 Objections to Philosophic Sagacity

Of course, philosophic sagacity is not immune to objections. Here are some of such objections.

1. Orika and his group has been criticised for failing to realise the main aim of philosophic sagacity which was to uncover authentic “African Philosophy”, in some primordial “uncontaminated” form (Serequeberhan, 1991:20). This is because; the product of the dialogue between the African Sage and the Western-trained philosopher is after all contaminated by Western idea.
2. The second objection is related to the first. It is claimed by some people that the product of the dialogue between the sage and the modern philosopher is no longer a single individual’s philosophy, by the output of many persons (Aja, 1999:94).
3. Finally, philosophic sagacity has been criticised by some people who claim that we no longer have a ‘pure’ African mind. This is because even the elders in the villages have now come in contact with foreign ways of life, institutions and beliefs— and may all have been influenced in one way or the other.

In spite of the attacks on philosophic sagacity, Orika is still to be commended for his contribution in trying to enrich African philosophy with truly African ideas.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, you learnt that philosophic sagacity is the second trend in African philosophy, which claims that the African philosophers can be discovered among wise men that we can find in the various African traditional societies. The main task of philosophic sagacity was to document authentic African philosophy by carefully arranging the views of local sages who have been interviewed by Western trained modern philosophers. One main objection against philosophic sagacity is that the interview method could mean that the interviewers could ask the sages leading questions and make the wise men say exactly what the modern philosopher intended. And, as a result, the outcome will be a group thought, rather than an individual's philosophy per say.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 5.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3)

What is philosophic sagacity all about?

Study Session6

Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will explore the concept of nationalist-ideological philosophy. We will also criticize and discuss their features.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 *highlight* the features of nationalist-ideological philosophy.
- 6.2 *discuss* the criticisms of nationalist-ideological philosophy.

6.1 What is Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy?

Aja (1999:94) has correctly described this trend as “philosophies born of struggle.” Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy is a philosophy that sought to attack colonial rule and European institutions by insisting that African traditional social and political institutions were better than the former. In short, the Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy is a philosophy developed for the purpose of the political liberation of African states.

6.1.1 Beliefs and Features of Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy

Once again, we shall be guided by Owolabi (2000) to succinctly outline the beliefs and attributes of this trend. They are:

1. The belief that an authentic traditional African thought existed and was effective at sustaining the pre-colonial African society.
2. The claim that the communal arrangement of traditional African society was based on equality, and therefore we should arrange today’s African societies in like manner.
3. The assumption that full liberation and genuine development will take place in today’s Africa if we bring back the traditional social and political arrangement.

ITQ

Question

- What is the focus of the nationalist-ideological philosophy?

Feedback

- It is an ideological position which holds that European cultures are not as the traditional African culture and practices. It is developed for the purpose of political liberation.

6.2 Criticisms of Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy

The Nationalist-Ideological School has been criticized just like other trends.

- 1) Critics of this trend generally say that the nature and structure of traditional society that supported communalism, socialism and family-hood are fast disappearing, so we cannot practice traditional politics in modern times.
- 2) Critics further say that even the so-called communal arrangement of the traditional societies may well have been imagined by the Nationalists. In other words, critics say that the traditional society was not really communal and just. After all, how come a handful of Europeans were able to overpower our ancestors?
- 3) Critics object to this trend because they argue that, in short, they cannot see how the ideas of “the ancient past” can adequately meet the challenges of our time.

However, some people have also applauded the nationalists by noting that “a political philosophy does not cease to be so simply because it is anachronistic or just because it cannot be effectively deployed for actual political practices.” After all, political philosophy is all about stating the ideal, whether or not it is accepted (Aja, 1999:95).

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we noted that nationalist-ideological philosophy is a trend in African philosophy that championed the cause for the independence of African states. Its members did this by repackaging traditional African social and political ideas as the best means of fighting colonialism and ruling the modern (free) African states. It was the belief of the nationalist-ideological school that communalism, African socialism and family-hood represent traditional and authentic African social and political ideas for the liberation and organization of the modern African states.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 6.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 6.1 and 6.2)

Outline the defining features and criticism against the nationalist-ideological philosophy.

Study Session 7

Professional Philosophy

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will learn about professional philosophy and the main arguments of the professional philosophers. We will also discuss the criticisms of professional philosophers.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 *describe* professional philosophy.
- 7.2 *appraise* the main arguments of professional philosophers.
- 7.3 *discuss* the criticisms of professional philosophers.

7.1 What is Professional Philosophy?

According to Peter Bodunrin, who was a member of this group, professional philosophy is the work of many trained philosophers. Many of them (including himself) reject the assumptions of ethnophilosophy and take a universalist view of philosophy. According to the professional philosophers, philosophy must have the same meaning in all cultures even though approaches may be affected by cultural biases and the problems facing the society from where the philosophers operate (Ibid). For this reason, African philosophy, Bodurin concludes, is the philosophy done by African philosophers whether it is in the area of logic, metaphysics, ethic or history of philosophy.

7.2 Main Claims of Professional Philosophy

The main claims of professional philosophy can be broken down into simple statements like these:

1. Writing is necessary for a philosophical tradition. Traditional Africans were not literate; therefore, there was no philosophy in the strict sense in traditional African societies.
2. Philosophy must be understood only in its strict, rigorous and critical sense and never in the loose or debased sense.
3. Ethnophilosophy can only become philosophy when it has undergone critical analysis and is documented.
4. The professional philosophers further argue that some things in the traditional cultures were quite bad and should be attacked by a truly African philosophy.

5. Professional philosophy also took a universalist approach to philosophy.

ITQ

Question

- How do the Professional philosophers define African philosophy?

Feedback

- We expect that your answer must take note that the professional philosophers saw African philosophy as any philosophy done by African philosophers in any area of philosophy.

7.3 Criticisms of Professional Philosophy

Some contemporary professional African philosophers have criticized the “professional philosophers” and their approach to African philosophy. Such critics argue among other things that:

1. The absence of a writing culture in traditional African does not mean there was no philosophical tradition. After all, the mode of transmitting beliefs and ideas does not really matter. Folklores and proverbs can be as effective as writing.
2. The claim that African philosophy is still in the making by professional philosophers trained in Western philosophy have also been regarded as “intellectual imperialism” or that such professional philosophers are trying to force us to accept Western philosophy as African.

Notwithstanding the above criticisms, professional philosophy has done well by insisting on the Universalist approach to philosophy.

ITQ

Question

- Under which of the approaches of African philosophy will you classify the professional philosophers?

Feedback

- Do you still remember the approaches that you learnt in Study Session three? Good! From what you have learnt here, you will agree that the professional philosophers rejected the position of ethnophilosophy and can be classified under the Universalist view or approach of African philosophy.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed professional philosophy. We also examined that professional philosophy is the work of many trained African philosophers that reject ethnophilosophy and opt for a Universalist approach to philosophy.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 7.1. (tests Learning Outcomes 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3)

What are the positions of the professional philosophers and outline the criticisms against them.

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Study Session 8

Hermeneutic-Narrative Philosophy

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will discuss hermeneutics, the main claims/features of hermeneutic-narrative philosophy. We will also identify the criticisms of hermeneutic-narrative philosophy.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 8.1 *define* hermeneutics.
- 8.2 *appraise* the claims of hermeneutic-narrative philosophy.
- 8.3 *discuss* the criticisms of hermeneutic-narrative philosophy.

8.1 Meaning and Application of Hermeneutics in African Philosophy

African Hermeneutics A scientific interpretation of nature and culture in Africa for the purpose of establishing African philosophy.

Broadly speaking, the term hermeneutics means interpretation (Oguejiofor and Onah, 2005:73). Although, many scholars have given different definitions to **hermeneutics** such that it lacks a universal definition (Ibid, Madu, 1992:3), “hermeneutics involve bringing out the inner meaning to the open.” It is about making what was implicit or hidden to become explicit or exposed. In short, hermeneutics is a quest for meaning (Oguejiofor and Onah, 2005, 73-74).

To be sure, hermeneutics did not originate in Africa. It is a method of philosophy adopted by some modern philosophers in Europe. These European philosophers of hermeneutics include W. Dilthey, E.D. Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer, K.O. Apel and J. Habermas. (Bell, 1989: 363-379, Owolabi, 2001: 147-163).

Okere and his followers in the Narrative-hermeneutic fold merely adopted hermeneutics from the above listed European philosophers. In the hands of Okere and the narrative school, hermeneutics came to mean a scientific interpretation of African natural and cultural data (possessions, experiences). It is the science of interpretation concerned with the comprehensive meaning, true or false of reality as it applies to the African course. This means that hermeneutics aims to separate truth from falsehood through the process of interpretation. African hermeneutics, however, seeks to articulate the meaning of African cultures as expressed in African languages, aesthetics, art, beliefs,

proverbs, songs, signs and symbols, legends, myths, metaphors, divination and incantations (Osuagwu, 1999:113-114).

ITQ

Question

- How will you define hermeneutics?

Feedback

- You can define hermeneutics as the quest or the science of meaning. It involves the bringing out of inner meaning.

8.2 Features of Hermeneutic-Narrative Philosophy

1. It is a shift away from ethnophilosophy because it insists on the orderly account of African culture, and it attempts to relate explanation to action;
2. it believes in a very strong relationship between culture and philosophy;
3. it also considers culture and nature as basic sources of raw materials for philosophy.
4. it asserts that philosophical hermeneutics is a methodology or condition for the scientific possibility and existence of African philosophy.

8.3 Criticisms of Hermeneutic-Narrative Philosophy

The main objection some people have leveled against Okere and the hermeneutic school is that it has failed to attract many members or disciples. But this is no longer true as many contemporary African philosophers are staunch followers of the hermeneutic school (Oguejiofor and Onah, 2005).

ITQ

Question

- Who is a major proponent of the hermeneutic-narrative philosophy?

Feedback

- The major proponent is Theophilus Okere.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we noted that hermeneutics is the science of unravelling the hidden meanings to things, which, bringing them into the open. It originated from Europe through Dilthey, Heidegger, Ricoeur and others. The main claim of hermeneutic-narrative philosophy is that there is a close link between philosophy and culture, so a scientific interpretation of African cultures and beliefs would yield African philosophy

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 8.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3)

Discuss the hermeneutic-narrative philosophy.

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Reading

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PART III

Ethics, Metaphysics and Religion

Introduction to Part Three

This is the third part of this manual, and it focuses on ethics and religion in African Philosophy.

As the debate concerning whether or not there is African Philosophy began to die down, after everyone accepted there is an African Philosophy, the traditions or trends that emerged from that debate shifted attention to actually **doing** African Philosophy. African philosophers began to write on African metaphysics, African ontology, African arts and aesthetics, African epistemology, African ethics and religion, African politics and other issues affecting the Continent.

In this part, we shall take up four such issues in African Philosophy:

Study Session 9	African Ethics and Moral Values
Study Session 10	African Metaphysics
Study Session 11	African Religion and God-Belief

Study Session 9

African Ethics and Moral Values

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will discuss the features of African Morality. We will also explain the concept of African ethics.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

9.1 *discuss* the basis of African morality.

9.2 *highlight* the features of African morality.

9.1 African Morality: Founded on Religion or Humanism?

Humanism The group of philosophies and ethical perspectives which emphasize the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively.

Perhaps, the most hotly contested issue in African ethics or morality is whether it is based on religion or **humanism**. Several African scholars have participated in this debate. Those who claim that somehow African morality has its roots in religion include J.S. Mbiti, E. Bolaji Idowu, and Moses Makinde. On the other hand, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye and Segun Gbadegesin argue strongly that African morality has its roots in African humanism.

To properly understand what the controversy is all about, we may need to define and outline the points put forward by each group.

Group 1: African Morality is founded on Religion

The main claims of this group include:

1. Africans live in a religious universe (the views of Mbiti, Idowu, Awolalu, etc)
2. Religion plays a great role in the lives of African people.
3. All their activities (including cultural practices) must be influenced by one religion or the other.
4. Therefore, an African system of morality (or ethics), based on African cultural beliefs, must have religious foundation (Makinde, cited by Gbadegesin, 1991:71).
5. Gbadegesin reconstructs Makinde's view in what could be seen as an alternative version of the above claims:

- a) Moral principles only make sense when we can distinguish between moral and immoral acts, between good and evil.
- b) The concept of good and evil... are necessary for our understanding of moral concepts and moral principles.
- c) God's will is the source of good and evil in man's behaviour without which we would never have had the concept of morality.
- d) Therefore, God must be the source of our concepts of morality.
- e) Therefore, Africans believe that God is the source of our moral ideas (Ibid, 75-76).

Group 2: African Morality is founded on Humanism

The second group of African scholars, led by Wiredu and Gyekye, totally reject the above points, whether as stated in the first instance or in the second. They argue on the contrary that:

- 1. Traditional African religion is not a revealed religion.
- 2. How, then, could they have had access to the commandments of God (or gods) to use as the basis of their moral system?
- 3. As a matter of fact, African traditional religion is "naturalistic" – i.e. arising out of human existence in the natural world.
- 4. African morality, just like our religion, is meant to guide and regulate human conduct in society.
- 5. Clearly, therefore, African moral values (morality) must necessarily have arisen from human experience in the natural world.

Another (simpler) way of understanding the position of the second group is to state the above points in a slightly different way.

- 1. African humanism is the practice in Africa whereby one has to show mutual respect to one's kinsman, and protect one another's interest because everything belongs to everyone.
- 2. African humanism is about securing the well-being of every human being (Wiredu, 1995:37).
- 3. Morality is about ensuring that the interest and well-being of all are preserved and protected.
- 4. Therefore, African morality is not derived or based on the wishes of any god or religion, but is based on human interest and well-being (humanism).

ITQ

Question

- What is African morality based on?

Feedback

- There are two different positions as regards this. There is the school that holds that African morality is founded on religion while there is another school that posit that African morality is founded on humanism.

9.2 Features of African Morality

Whether African morality is founded on religion or humanism there are certain moral values that characterize most African societies.

1. The moral system pursues human well-being and social welfare.
2. Morality helps to cement harmonious social relationships and solidarity.
3. Ethical egoism or doing things only to protect one's interest is disapproved.
4. Thus, moral values emphasize social and community interest ahead of the individual
5. Morality imposes social responsibility on all. That is, one is expected to show concern and care for the interest of other persons and the community at large.
6. Good personal character is a major goal of the moral system.
7. As a result, the cultivation of excellent moral virtues, such as probity, patience kindness, fairness, humility, gratitude, moderation, temperance, generosity, contentment, hospitality, perseverance, trustworthiness, truthfulness, respect for older people, chastity before marriage, and faithfulness in marriage, are widely encouraged in African societies (Gyekye, 1996: 55-71).
8. The opposite of the above moral virtues, such as greed, adultery, sexual promiscuity, disobedience and disrespect for elders, laziness, lying and stealing are all greatly frowned at in African societies.

Let us however, note that some of these moral virtues or vices are emphasized, or disapproved to a higher or lesser degree in different African societies.

ITQ

Question

- What is humanism?

Feedback

- It is a philosophical concept that places emphasis on the values and rational capacity of human beings, both individually and collectively.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we noted that two groups of African scholars have emerged as to whether African moral values are founded on religion or humanism. The first group argues that religion plays a very significant role in everything the African does. Therefore, African morality must (somehow be founded or based on religion. The second group argues that African religion is not a revealed religion and that evidence points to the very fact that African moral values are founded on human interest and well-being, that is, humanism. The main features of African morality include the very fact that everyone is encouraged to pursue their interests by doing well to other members of the community.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 9.1 (tests Learning Outcome 9.1)

Explain the two positions as regards the basis of African morality.

Bibliography



Reading

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Study Session 10

African Metaphysics

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will focus on African metaphysics, some major features of African metaphysics and lastly some of the central themes in African metaphysics.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 10.1 *discuss* African metaphysics.
- 10.2 *point out* the major features of African metaphysics.
- 10.3 *discuss* at least four central themes in African metaphysics.

10.1 Is there an African Metaphysics?

Metaphysics The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of ultimate reality.

You will wonder why we should ask this question at this point. Why asking whether there is an African **metaphysics**, instead of telling us what it is? But you will recall the earlier debate about whether African philosophy exists or not. You'll also recall that the debate became necessary because some Western scholars had said that Africans were inferior to the Whites and altogether sub-humans! Well, part of what those Western scholars also said is that Africans are not rational. The implication of this is that Africans are not able to think deeply about important things of life. And if Africans could not think deeply about anything, how can there be African metaphysics? Or quite simply, how can anyone claim that there are some people in Africa who have attempted to provide answers to the kind of questions, metaphysical in nature that we earlier raised?

But in contemporary times, no one still believes that rationality is a preserve of the West or any particular group of people. The fact is: Africans can think just the same way Indians, Americans or Europeans can. So it means that there is such a thing as African metaphysics. But then, every philosophical thinking even when it originates from a particular society ought to attempt to get itself understandable and perhaps useful within other cultures. That is the only way rationality as a universal human ability can be made sense of. That is also why communication across cultures is possible. So, in discussing African metaphysics, one is careful not to pretend that all the issues can be raised and completely resolved, using only African concepts and ideas. Or even that such issue applies only to African societies.

ITQ

Question

- What is metaphysics?

Feedback

- It is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of reality.

10.2 Features/Characteristics of African Metaphysics

The following can be said to be true of metaphysical thinking in most African societies. With minor modifications and very rare exceptions in Africa:

1. Metaphysical thinking is empirically derived and drawn from human relations. This means that metaphysical ideas are drawn from physical day-to-day experience of the African and are meant to serve some purpose in actual social relations. We will say more on this in this lecture.
2. Metaphysics does not treat the abstract or the unreal (Tempels, 1998:430). This is related to the first point. Africans do not look for general ideas about things that they do not experience or are unreal.
3. Metaphysics is based on the perception of reality as determined by history, geographical circumstances, culture, and religion, thought systems, language and the African worldview. This means that metaphysics in Africa contains certain notions that may be peculiar to Africa, like spirit, ancestral worship, witchcraft, magic, etc. (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 137-38).
4. African metaphysics is holistic and hierarchical in nature. This means that in Africa, everything hangs together in a system where God is at the top and the living person at the center. 'Force' is gained or lost between entities at different stages of the hierarchical structure.
5. African metaphysics tends to be 'supernatural' – especially to the Western eye. But like we have said, African metaphysics is largely empirical.
6. Causality plays an important role in metaphysical thinking (Ibid, 139).

10.3 Themes in African Metaphysics

Let us briefly discuss some of the themes in African metaphysics.

10.3.1 God

God in African Life

With very few exceptions, most Africans believe in God. And God has a central place in their lives.

God as a Supreme Being

Africans believe that God is the Supreme Being. A benevolent God with a great sense of goodwill. God is not far removed from us. He is the ultimate controller of nature and the laws that govern it. Thus, God overlooks everything we do.

God as Creator

God is believed as the creator of the world. But again, since he is not outside the world, he didn't create the world out of nothing. Most African stories about the creation of the world include versions that say God created the world using one thing or the other.

10.3.2 Ancestors

In examining the relationship between the African and the ancestors, it becomes completely clear that there is really no dichotomy between the supernatural and the natural world. We 'easily' communicate with our ancestors, who are merely occupying a higher status in our ontology.

10.3.3 Witchcraft

Witchcraft, magic, sorcery and so on, are not peculiar to African societies. But their spread and degree of 'social relevance' is such that they deserve special mention in Africa. This is because in certain parts of Africa as we are all well aware of, lightning killing people or the death of a child, all too soon could be blamed on a relation. Usually, such a relation would be aged or a barren woman. Or even a small child of three to nine years could be accused of witchcraft. The penalty? Death by lynching, once 'found guilty.' But how do the witches operate? It is claimed that they have extraordinary ability to transform their bodies into birds, rats, cats, lions or other dangerous animal to harm their victims.

However, it has being argued by some African philosophers that witchcraft is very real in Africa like science and technology is to the West. But that it is merely a logical error arising from confusing a means of 'making sense' of situations and finding the actual cause.

10.3.4 Personhood

Africans do not make a radical distinction between the mind and the body. Selfhood or personhood rather has to do with social relations. You

become a person because your status in the community both moral and otherwise is acceptable.

10.3.5 Destiny

Destiny is very important to African conception of the person. It is not clear whether a person chooses his destiny or whether it is imposed on him. But Africans punish people when they do wrong. We can only then conclude that whether people choose or get their destiny by imposition, one is free and can have a say on how his destiny is actualised (See Ibid, 140-47).

ITQ

Question

- What is the penalty or witchcraft in African societies?

Feedback

- It is death by lynching.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed African metaphysics. We also examined major features and central themes of African metaphysics.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 10.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 10.1 and 10.2)

Do we have anything like an African metaphysics?

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Study Session 11

African Religion and God-Belief

Introduction

In this study session, we will pay more attention to African mode of religion and belief in God.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 11.1 *explain* at least three factors to be considered in studying African religions.
- 11.2 *discuss* at least three positions in the philosophy of African religion.
- 11.3 *highlight* some distinctions between God-belief in African and Western religions.

11.1 Issues and Outlook of African Religions

There are several factors to consider in an effort to study and understand African religion, its beliefs and practices. They include, (as have been clearly outlined by Metuh, 1991: vii) the following:

African religions are non-scriptural religions. The societies in which these religions are found are pre-literate societies. Thus, there are no documentary sources handed down by tradition as authentic sources of their religious beliefs. So what we know about the origins of most African religions came down to us through oral traditions or is passed down from generation to generation through words of mouth.

There are about one thousand different African peoples (tribes), each with its own religious systems. This increases the difficulties of trying to understand 'African religion.' This means that it is not really correct to talk about 'an African traditional religion.' But then, most of them have similar practices.

African religions are part and parcel of the whole fabric of African cultural life. This means that no one can really remove religion from African cultures. Religious matters are closely interwoven within the social, psychological and moral aspects of life.

It is not easy to translate African concepts into western concepts. This means that it won't be easy to translate the concepts found in African religion into Western languages. Concepts like 'God', 'soul', 'sacrifices', 'taboos', 'man', 'prayers', etc. do not have exactly the same meaning in Western religions as they are understood in African religions. Therefore, there is the problem of accurately translating African religious concepts into Western languages without the loss of meanings.

11.2 The Philosophy of African Religion

Philosophy of African religion has to do with the disputes concerning the nature of traditional African religion, their variety and description. Other aspects of the philosophy of African religion deal with the works of some philosophers who want African religions to be decolonised (See for example Wiredu, 1998:186-210). Let us discuss some of these positions:

- 1) **African religion as serving social harmony:** There are some people who say that there is no more motives or reasons why our forefathers practiced their religions, beyond that of social harmony. The quest for social harmony and the quest for food are the main reasons why traditional religions were put in place.
- 2) **Other people reject the above view:** Evans-Pritchard, Robin Horton, etc. for example, propose **the scientific model** as a means of understanding African religion. Traditional religion, says Horton, is an attempt by traditional peoples to define the ultimate grounds of all existence. It tries to discover the constant principle that can help us to make sense of the ever-changing nature of things (see Horton, 1993).
- 3) There are those who believe that the best way to understand African religion is to **'reduce' the concepts in African religions into their equivalents in Western religions**. But the problem with this method is that African cultures and Western cultures are different, and their beliefs also differ. As we said earlier, the same words can have different meanings in Africa and the West (see Okot, p' Bitek, 1970).
Again, Okot p' Bitek has argued that Africans like speaking in concrete terms, while the West favour abstract terms, making it even more difficult to carry over African religious concepts to the West. However, as Metuh correctly observes, Africans are quite capable of forming abstract terms. Even more so as abstract concepts can be expressed in concrete terms (Metuh, 1991: ix-x).
- 4) Wiredu claims that there is a need to decolonise African religions. This can be done by Africans who must be the ones to write about their own religions, and not Western scholars.

ITQ

Question

- What is meant by saying that African religions are non-scriptural?

Feedback

- What this means is that since the societies were preliterate and had no sense of writing, African religions did not sacred books from which they can read from as it is with Christianity where you have the Bible and Islam with the Qu'ran.

11.3 God-Belief in African Ontology

Apart from what you already know about Africans' belief in God from our last lecture, there are a few additional points to note:

- 1) Unlike in Western societies, traditional Africans did not quarrel about whether or not God or the Supreme Deity existed. How could they? God was always with them in everything.
- 2) In some African conceptions of God, like the Yoruba, (*Olodumare*) is not considered as all-powerful. After all, people are actually allowed to choose their destiny when coming into the world. This is done in the presence of *Olodumare* who now seals the chosen destiny to ensure that the person fulfils it in life. But then, the Yoruba believe that one's destiny (that has been sealed by God) could be altered in life! Witches, powerful medicine men and the person's character can all change the God-sealed destiny. If this be the case, then the Yoruba could not hold that God is all-powerful (Oladipo, 2006:77-78).

ITQ

Question

- How can African religions be decolonized, according to Wiredu?

Feedback

- It can be decolonized if Africans write about their own religions.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we noted that the factors required in studying African religions. African religions are not scriptural religious and are not documented. We also explored that the philosophy of African religion has to do with the disagreement concerning the nature of African religions and the need to decolonize their concepts. In Africa, the question about whether God exists or not is not raised and Unlike in Western religions, God is not conceived as all-powerful in some African religions.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 11.1 (tests Learning Outcome 11.1)

Identify the factors that are to be considered in the study of African religions.

SAQ 11.2 (tests Learning Outcomes 11.2)

Present the positions in the philosophy of African religion.

SAQ 11.3 (tests Learning Outcome 11.3)

Is God in African religion the same with that in the western sense?

PART IV

Cross-Cultural Comparison

Introduction to Part Four

You are most welcome to the fourth and last main part in this course manual. This part is made up of three Study Sessions. Study Session twelve is titled, 'African Epistemology'; Study Session thirteen is on 'The Language Question' and the final Study Session is 'Postmodernism and the Question of African Philosophy.'

The three Study Sessions have one thing in common. They differently and jointly showcase the efforts made by African scholars to demonstrate that reason, is not after all, exclusive to the West. Although, the impetus for some of these contributions has come from the West, African reinterpretations of some Western ideas have come out as African standpoints.

Study Session 12

African Epistemology

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will discuss the concept of epistemology. We will also explain a special African mode of knowing epistemology. Finally, we will take a look at the sources of African epistemology.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 12.1 *define* and *use* correctly the term epistemology.
- 12.2 *discuss* African mode of epistemology.
- 12.3 *Highlight* the sources of African epistemology.

12.1 Meaning of Epistemology

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with knowledge. It analyses and evaluates knowledge claims. It is the study of theories about the nature and scope of knowledge, the evaluation of the presuppositions and bases of knowledge, and the scrutiny of knowledge claims.' (Kaphagawani, 1998:2006).

ITQ

Question

- What is epistemology?

Feedback

- Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the study of knowledge.

12.2 Is there a Special African Mode of Knowing?

In this section, we will review two divergent views to the question of “a special African mode of knowing?” using the propositions of two scholars: Senghor and Wiredu”

There is a Unique African Epistemology-Senghor

As we have already told you, there are among African philosophers those who believe that there is a unique African mode of knowing. Senghor, the Senegalese statesman was in the forefront of it all. Again, it was Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* that provided the awakening in Senghor to formulate **negritude**. Negritude is Senghor's special philosophy aimed at

rehabilitating African culture for the purpose of political struggle.

Along the line, Senghor saw that one way of rebuilding African culture was to include 'African epistemology' in his Negritude platform. This African epistemology is presented by Senghor and his followers as 'the way the African understands, interprets and apprehends reality within the context of the African cultural experience' (Udefi, 2005:78).

When all is said and done, Senghor's views can be put together as a belief in epistemological monism (oneness). For him, the African does not draw any line of demarcation between the epistemic subject (the knower) and the epistemic object (what is to be known). The African, as this view continues, reacts to the object in a sensuous, emotive and intuitive understanding rather than by abstraction. The simple point here is that the African does not detach himself from the object to be known, but merely imposes his particular subjective view and rhythm upon the object.

According to Senghor:

The Negro-African sympathizes, abandons his personality to become identified with the other; dies to be reborn in the other. He does not assimilate, he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the other; he lives in symbiosis (Senghor, 1964:72-73).

All that Senghor is claiming is that there is an African mindset, unique in its ability to be united with his environment without knowing the difference between the subject and the object. And in this way such a mind comes to know things.

A Unique African Epistemology is an Illusion- Wiredu

A great number of professional African philosophers are united in the rejection of a unique African mode of knowing or epistemology. In some cases, tempers rose to the point that the criticisms became personal. People abandoned logical and rational arguments to simply hurl invectives at the protagonists of a unique African epistemology. This is evident in Wiredu's (who again leads the critics') sustained attacks against Senghor:

In enumerating the many evils that are drawing back the prospects of development in African, Wiredu included Senghor and his idea of a 'Unique African epistemology.' Yes, Wiredu agrees that this traditional mode of understanding, utilising and controlling external nature and interpreting the place of man within it (i.e. African epistemology), may even exist everywhere in Africa. But, because it (African epistemology) is intuitive, essentially unanalytic and unscientific, Senghor shouldn't have celebrated it. Worst still, in Wiredu's opinion,

Senghor... tended to exaggerate the role of emotion in the thinking of Africans, and he has even seemed inclined to postulate a biological foundation for the alleged differentiating characteristics of the African outlook in a manner that does little credit to his great learning. It is almost as if he (Senghor) has been trying to exemplify in his own thought and discourse the lack of the analytical habit which he has attributed to the biology of the

African. (Emphasis added) (Wiredu, 1980:11-12).

What Wiredu is saying here is that Senghor himself was trying to make himself an example of an African who could not think in a logical, rational or scientific way. Wiredu's general view is right. Although, the attacks on Senghor is rather harsh. Philosophers sometimes do this in order to drive a point home. But making our points in a different way is better.

To return to the main point, Wiredu is again right in saying that there is a place for intuition and emotion in a human being's life, the same as there should also be a place for logic and rationality. The African, he concludes, possesses these two sides of life. Or if the African does not, this authentic African epistemology should include both sides of life. But Senghor is not entirely without a point. There could be a way of knowing peculiar to Africans, only that Senghor went too far.

Now we need to clarify that there are some ways of knowing that may indeed be unique to Africans. But the wise points Wiredu have made are:

1. Apart from the unique ways of knowing in Africa, many Africans do think in a logical and analytic way, and
2. Even if Africans rely on emotion, intuitive knowledge, hierarchical authoritarianism, and superstition for knowledge, we should not celebrate such features of African epistemology. This is because they will hamper development in Africa – which we badly need. Our discussion in the next subtitle will show this more clearly.

ITQ

Question

- Who was the frontline proponent of the notion of an African mode of knowing?

Feedback

- Leopold Sedar Senghor.

12.3 Sources of African Epistemology

According to Uduigwomen (1995), there are many sources of acquiring knowledge in traditional African societies. He lists seven such sources:

12.3.1 Perceptual Knowledge

Africans depend on observation rather than experimentation as a method of acquiring knowledge. That is to say that traditional Africans believe in knowledge acquired through the senses- what one sees, touches, feels, hears and tastes are usually regarded as true, especially, if a third party confirms such an observation.

12.3.2 Inferential Knowledge

If something happens repeatedly in Africa, and if many people observe it,

then it becomes a reference point, perhaps without further inquiry.

12.3.3 Holistic Knowledge

This is the view of knowledge that Senghor and Anyanwu so much favoured. Here, the subject and object are united or not separated during the act of knowing.

12.3.4 Extra-Sensory or Mystical Knowledge

This kind of knowledge goes beyond what we can observe with the senses. Diviners, mediums, priests, native-doctors, rain-makers and herbalists are usually approached to acquire mystical knowledge. They are of course feared or revered for their ability to mediate between human beings and spirits.

12.3.5 Premonitive Knowledge

In Africa, virtually everyone may claim to have this kind of knowledge. Someone is about to make a journey, and hits his left toe on a tree stump or a stone- then he may cancel the journey because that was a clear sign of an impending danger. Incessant sneezing is a sign that your name is being mentioned in a shrine with evil intent, and so on.

12.3.6 Ontological Knowledge

Again, this is another source of knowledge that many professional philosophers including Wiredu object to. This is because here, the African arranges all beings in an ascending order, with God at the topmost. And, in this way, an elder's knowledge claim would weigh heavily even if contradicted by many youths – assuring they are even allowed to speak.

12.3.7 Oral Tradition

We have talked about the oral tradition before. As a source of knowledge, information, beliefs, customs, world-views, etc are handed down from one generation to another through myths, legends, stories, proverbs, folktales, songs and dances, liturgies and rituals, pithy sayings, riddles and adages, ideas, social attitudes, conventions and institutions (Uduigwomen, 1995:35-39).

You'll also recall that the professional philosophers rejected this as an approach to African philosophy, saying that philosophy cannot be done without writing. They also say that knowledge passed on through oral tradition is unreliable.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we defined epistemology as a branch of philosophy, which studies the nature, scope and possibility of human knowledge. Some African philosophers claim that there is a unique African mode of knowing. Senghor is the leading figure among this group. He claims that intuition and emotion are to the Africans as logic

and rationality are to the Europeans. KwasiWiredu is a major critic of this Senghorian understanding of African epistemology.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 12.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 12.1, 12.2, and 12.3)

How will you discuss the theme “African mode of knowing?”

Study Session 13

The Language Question

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will explain the importance of language in human affairs. We will also discuss the reasons why African scholars worry over the language of African literature.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 13.1 *explain* the importance of language in human affairs.
- 13.2 *discuss* the reasons why African scholars are worried about the language of African literature.
- 13.3 *highlight* some of the obstacles in the way of African languages.

13.1 Importance of Language in Human Affairs

Language is important in human affairs because it is a tool, the means through which we communicate. Language is made up of human speech; body of words and idioms, or a mode of expression, any manner of expressing thought or feeling. Language is artificial and learnt. It can be a system of signs and symbols with rules for forming intelligible communication. And it goes without saying that without communication human beings could not live in any form of society. We won't be here; not even the family would exist.

13.2 Worry of African Scholars over Language of African Literature?

The main arguments pursued by those who attempt to address the language question in Africa are:

1. Language is the memory bank of a people. The claim here is that whatever people have in their language is what they will remember. In other words, a people can neither comprehend nor use ideas they cannot somehow understand in their language. Ngugi is one of those who argue in this way (1986).
2. Language is a carrier of values. The argument here is that a people's culture is carried from one generation to another through the vehicle of language. The values they cherish are embodied in language. If the language disappears, so would those values and even, perhaps, the people themselves.

3. Language is crucial for development. It follows from the above that a people's political, social, agricultural and family values are understood or carried through language. African scholars argue that we need to use our own indigenous languages for education in order to foster development in every sector of modern Africa.
4. Language development is crucial for conceptual decolonisation. Wiredu and some others emphasize the need for conceptual decolonisation in the struggle to free Africa from Western imperialism and Eurocentricism. The overall idea here is that we need to translate important concepts into our indigenous languages so as to find out where our real social, political and metaphysical problems lie. This is because some of the problems that Europe and America experience, simply have no meaning in Africa, or have meaning that are quite different from their Western counterparts (Wiredu, 1995; Oladipo, 1995).

ITQ

Question

- Who argued that language is the memory bank of the people?

Feedback

- The answer is Ngugi WaThiong'o.

13.3 Obstacles in the Way of African Languages

Views like those cited above are usually not contested. But some people will point to a number of reasons or obstacles in the way of realising the lofty aims of Wiredu and his followers. These obstacles include:

1. African societies are multi-lingual. There are too many languages in Africa. Many of them have dialects and other in-between multiple tongues. For example, of the estimated over 6000 languages and dialects in the world, 2,582 languages and 1,382 dialects are found in Africa alone. Worst still, only about 50 of those languages are spoken by up to one million speakers. In Nigeria, there are probably more than 500 different languages and dialects spoken. So, if we have to translate, which languages do we translate into?
2. The cost of translation is prohibitive. It requires huge sums of money to embark on translation projects. African nations are poor, and there are too many languages out there.
3. African languages are not scientific languages or are poorly developed. This view is not completely true. Some African languages are even more advanced than English language; the Bantu language, for example (Kaphagawani, 1998). But it is a major obstacle. We need to develop our languages to serve for science and technology. Again, this is a hard task requiring heavy funding, practice and time.
4. We need to reach a wider audience. This view somehow mirrors some of those outlined above. But, some African writers like Chinua Achebe argue that if we write in some obscure languages like

Ngugi's *Gikuyu*, how many people will read them? Even some of us cannot read in our own mother tongues! But here is exactly what we should fight against. People should be able to read and write in their own languages.

In spite of all these obstacles, we can still begin from somewhere. After all, there was a time English was an inferior language.

ITQ

Question

- Who is the chief proponent of the idea of conceptual decolonisation?

Feedback

- The answer is Kwasi Wiredu.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we learned that language is the only means of human communication, and without language there would be no human society. Some African scholars argue that we need to read, write and think in African languages because it is an important factor in our quest for development in Africa. There are some obstacles in the way of realising the dreams of African social linguists expressed above. These are: the under-developed nature of African languages; the plurality of African languages, the high cost of translation, and the desire to reach a wider audience.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 13.1 (tests Learning Outcome 13.1)

Does language play a role in human existence?

SAQ13.2 (tests learning outcome 13.2 and 13.3)

African indigenous languages are a tool of development. Discuss.

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Study Session 14

Postmodernism and the Question of African Philosophy

Introduction

In this last Study Session, we will explore what postmodernism is. We will also discuss why postmodernism is so important to African philosophy and ideas.

Learning Outcomes



When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 14.1 *define* and use correctly the term “postmodernism”.
- 14.2 *discuss* the relationship between philosophy and postmodernism.
- 14.3 *explain* the views of African scholars to postmodernism.

14.1 What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism The wide-ranging cultural movement, which adopts a sceptical attitude to many of the principles and assumptions that have underpinned Western thought and social life.... These assumptions include a belief... in the power of reason.

According to *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, **postmodernism** is a wide-ranging cultural movement, which adopts a sceptical attitude to many of the principles and assumptions that have underpinned Western thought and social life.... These assumptions include a belief in the power of reason (Sim, 2001:339). So what postmodernists are saying is that *reason* or rationality should no longer occupy such a high place after all. You recall that the main excuse Western scholars gave for abusing Africans and calling them sub-humans is because those Western scholars claimed that Africans lacked reason, and that reason is the most important *human* possession.

But again, let us also realise that once again, postmodernism originated from the West. This time they are completely reversing what they used to say was the *truth*.

However, we need to say more about postmodernism and how Africans have responded to it in the last decade or so.

ITQ

Question

- What is postmodernism?

Feedback

- It is the series of effort by western philosophers to reject the notion of objectivity and a universal truth.

14.2 Philosophy and Postmodernism

14.2.1 Philosophy

For a very long time, modern Western philosophers beginning from Descartes, Locke and Kant to the present day put a lot of hope and emphasis on the power of philosophy as a privileged discipline. Philosophy was seen as the “Queen of the Sciences.” A position that gave philosophy the superior status in the intellectual field. Philosophy had the right to adjudicate in the claims of other disciplines, to question them about the foundations of their knowledge claims. In short, philosophy was seen as the ‘Supreme Court’ of all ideas, where everyone must come and justify their claims. Philosophy claimed that there was such a thing as absolute and foundational knowledge. This certain and foundational knowledge is the basis of all knowledge. Of course, the way to finding or discovering this basic knowledge was through the power of reason. And the further claim was that reason itself was an exclusive attribute of the European man. The above depiction of knowledge and philosophy was used to deny Africans rationality, humanity, freedom and everything else.

14.2.2 Postmodernism

Now, postmodernism is the totality of the efforts by some Western scholars to reverse all or most of the above claims. Richard Rorty (an American philosopher) was a major postmodernist writer. Rorty’s main argument is that philosophy is ill-suited to perform the above listed tasks. This is because, like other disciplines, philosophy has its own biases, beliefs and assumptions, which in themselves need justifications.

Rorty further contends that truth is relative (what is true at one point or a culture may not be true at other points and culture). Therefore, truth is relative to social agreement, or what everyone accepts in a society. The overall claim of Rorty is that truth, knowledge and rationality have no universal essence (or meaning). They could be interpreted, understood and applied differently in diverse cultures the world over. It is therefore incorrect, in Rorty’s view, to “divide (world) culture up into areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (Rorty 1980:3).

Going by Rorty’s views, we can then define postmodernism as the view that no one culture is superior to the other, and that reason could not be the basis of excluding a people from humanity.

14.2.3 Survey of African Responses on Postmodernism in Africa

As usual, there are opposing views concerning postmodernism in Africa. Some Africanist scholars have expressed scepticism about the real intentions of Western postmodern scholars. They wonder why the Western scholars are now declaring the “death of all subjects” at a point where Africans are now beginning to find their own subjects. Also, some other Africanist scholars are worried that if postmodernism is accepted, it

might trivialize or make unimportant the truth of the historical fact that Europe plundered Africa (Magubane, 2005).

However, some African scholars see the matter differently. They see postmodernism as a continuation of the critical debates on African philosophy. In one of such views, postmodernism is accepted as a call to “our analytic African philosophers who place much faith in the universal, critical, rational, and systematic method of philosophy, on the basis of which they dismiss the idea of a collective (African) epistemology... to rethink their position (Udefi, 2009:78-86).

ITQ

Question

- Which philosopher held that truth can differ with regards to cultural backgrounds?

Feedback

- The answer is Richard Rorty.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we learned that Postmodernism is a movement which casts doubts on the traditional assumptions of Western society. It rejects the supremacy of reason and insists that no culture is superior to the other. Philosophy was presumed to play the role of “the Queen of all Sciences” that is privileged to adjudicate on the knowledge claims of other disciplines. Richard Rorty’s main view on postmodernism is that truth is relative to social agreement and that philosophy’s quest for certain, foundational knowledge was wrong, misleading and altogether impossible. Africanist scholars and philosophers respond to postmodernism in different ways: Some think it might be harmful to African interests while others think it is an opportunity to establish African epistemology and philosophy on solid footing.

Assessment

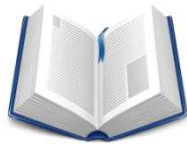


Assessment

SAQ 14.1 (tests Learning Outcome 14.1, 14.2 and 14.3)

Discuss postmodernism and the views of African scholars about it.

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Notes on Self Assessment Questions

SAQ 1.1

In this question, we expect you to first discuss the nature of the relationship between Europe and Africa prior to the advent of the slave trade. During this time, there was a mutual level of respect between the two. There was trade and commerce between the two climes and the transaction was friendly.

We expect you to point out that things started at a point when the slave trade was introduced. With the practice of the slave trade, eurocentrism gradually became entrenched and thinkers started bringing up ideas to support this action of eurocentrism. Examples of these philosophers are David Hume, Immanuel Kant, G.W. Hegel, and Levy-Bruhl. We expect you to discuss the contributions of each of them to the growth of eurocentrism.

We expect you to note Hume's position that no invention or civilization can be traced to Africa and that naturally, Africans are inferior to Europeans; Kant's position that the white race is the standard race and that the black race is symbolic of stupidity; Hegel's position that Africa has no history and Africans cannot boast of thinking reasonability as they are lawless savages; and Levy-Bruhl's position that Africans are pre-logical in nature.

SAQ 2.1

In answering this question, we expect you to take note of the difficult nature of defining African philosophy, the various definitions to it, and the nature of African philosophy. We expect you to point out that the debate as regards the definitions and note the meta-philosophical nature of African philosophy on the ground that majority of definitions are the opinions of each author or a position as regards what should be the actual methodology of African philosophy.

We also expect you to talk about the possible definitions of African philosophy which are the definition of African philosophy as the logic of oral tradition, African philosophy as the dispute between the traditionalists and the modernists as well as the definition of African philosophy as 'text writing'. We expect you to talk about each of these possible definitions and attempt a critique of them.

Finally, we also expect that your answer would include the nature and scope and nature of African philosophy. Your answer should answer the question, 'what constitutes African philosophy?'. Would it be texts written by African philosophers alone or philosophical texts written by any African on Africa or philosophical texts written by non-Africans on Africa?

SAQ 3.1

You were introduced to six approaches in this study session and so we expect that you will explore four out of them. These approaches include the traditionalist intellectual sage approach, the particularists or relevance approach, the universalists or pluralists approach, the language methodology, the conceptual decolonization approach, and the periodization or classification method. We expect you to discuss each approach you have picked and pick out the critiques against it.

The traditionalists intellectual sage approach is the position that all we need to do in doing African philosophy is to go back to the elders in our respective culture and engage them in discussions on philosophical matters and document such as African philosophy. We expect to note that this approach has however been criticized as not been individualistic whereas philosophy is an individualistic task. We also expect you to point out that the approach has also been criticized on the ground that since these elders have no sense of writing, they cannot do philosophy as doing philosophy requires writing.

The particularists or relevance approach is the position that whatever is called African philosophy must have a relevance and importance to African societies.

The Universalists are those who hold that African philosophy requires a cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary comparison. The ground they gave for this is that Africa is a part of the world and so shares in the burden the world carries. Thus, Africa's problem is the world's problem and the world's problem is Africa's. They also argued that some things are common in all philosophy and so it is inappropriate to brand one African philosophy since we do not have African physics, African engineering, etc.

Another approach you may talk about is the language method. This approach condemns the fact that African philosophy is done in foreign languages and this, enstranges the ideas espoused in it from Africa. Hence, this method holds that foreign ideas and concepts should be domesticated so that it can have meaning to us in our own environment.

Another approach you can talk about is conceptual decolonization. It involves shaking off the colonial mentality off one and thus thinking philosophically in one's indigenous language. Conceptual decolonization means that we shake off the colonial imposition on our concepts and think such concepts out in our language.

The last approach you can draw from is the periodization or classification approach. This approach advocates a reconstitution of African philosophy as it is believed that this will lead to solving the controversies about the existence and validity of African philosophy.

SAQ 4.1

In discussing this, we expect you to tell us about what you understand by ethnophilosophy. This is meant to cover the features and the criticism against the idea. We expect you to point out that the idea rose in response to the Eurocentric views about Africa and as well as an attempt to sell Africa to the West. We expect you to explain that ethnophilosophy entails

the documentation of the myths, ritual practices, and other institutional practices of African societies.

As part of the features, we expect you to talk about the belief that African cultures are the same; the romanticization of the African past; an adoption of the descriptive way of doing philosophy; a depiction of the difference in the way and manner of thinking of Africans and Europeans; and a belief in philosophy as a communal project.

You are also expected to point out the criticisms against it which includes, amongst others, the undue romanticization of the African past as if all there were good and emulatable; the overt acceptance of the claim of inferiority of Africans; and the fact that it does not actually serve Africa's interest but an attempt at colonizing the African mind.

SAQ 5.1

We expect you to note that a question as this is meant to tell us what philosophic sagacity is responding to and what the idea itself entails as well as the criticisms against it.

Philosophic sagacity rejects the position of ethnophilosophy as regards equating African philosophy with communal thoughts. For it, there are elders in African societies who do not only understand their cultures but can successfully engage these cultural beliefs in critical analysis and even hold dissenting views from that of their community. These elders are the sage.

The task of this idea thus is to find these sages in African societies, engage them in a dialogue, find out whether they hold divergent views from that of their society, compare their views, and attempt to systematize the views of the sages in a rigorous and critical manner.

In your criticism of philosophic sagacity, we expect you to note the claim that there is already a pollution of the African mind with European ideas and so the ideas of the sages can no longer be uniquely African without western influence on it. Similarly, since someone has to serve as a midwife for the sages, it no longer serves as the work of just a person.

SAQ 6.1

From what you have studied in this session, you will discover that the nationalist-ideological philosophy rose out of the attacks on African values by the Eurocentric views about African past and culture. In this light, this orientation holds that African traditional practices and socio-political institutions are better than Europe's. Thus, they hold that development and liberation will only come Africa's way if we return to our traditional practices and institution.

Some of the outstanding features of the trend was that African thoughts existed before the advent of colonialism and it was sufficient to sustain our pre-colonial societies; that African societies were run on a communal level which had at its base equality which will be an asset in present times; and that Africa will only develop if we go back to our roots.

This trend has however been criticized on many grounds. One of such grounds is the doubt on the veracity of the existence of communalism in Africa indeed. Its critics have argued that African societies were not

indeed communal in nature and just since it would not have been possible for the Europeans to have overpowered them were this notion of justness and communalism to be true. Besides this, the critics also noted that the social structures which aided communalism are no longer in place and so such system may not be practiceable in our time again. In addition to that, they claimed that the possibility of this communalism meeting the demands of present times is dubitable.

SAQ 7.1

We expect you to point out the claims and the criticisms of/against professional philosophy.

From what you have studied here so far, you can deduce some positions of this trend. One of the features of professional philosophy is their subscription to the universalist view of philosophy and a rejection of ethno philosophy on the ground that it is not written and documented and subjected to rigour and criticism. They claim that it is not all about the African traditional past that is good and philosophy should always be in its strict sense.

The major criticism against the professional philosophy is that against their position as regards writing. The critics disagree with them and held that philosophy is possible even without any form of writing. Afterall, verbal communication can be as effective as writing. Another criticism is that the professional philosophers are as good as intellectual imperialists because they seem not to be giving way to African philosophy.

SAQ 8.1

This philosophy was popularized by Theophilus Okere.

Hermeneutics is itself the science of interpretations. In this light, we can call African hermeneutics the scientific interpretation of nature and culture in Africa with a view to establishing African philosophy. For Okere and his followers, their aim is to articulate the meaning of African cultures.

This philosophy, we expect you to point out, believe in the strong link between culture and philosophy and that culture and nature are the main data necessary for philosophy. They also make a shift from ethno philosophy through their insistence on the orderly account of the African culture and relating explanation with action. Finally, they hold that philosophical hermeneutics is a necessary precondition for the scientific possibility and existence of African philosophy.

This philosophy, we expect you to note, has been criticized for not been able to draw membership to its fold.

SAQ 9.1

From what you have studied here so far, you will agree with us that there are two divergent positions as regards what the basis of the African morality is. There are those who argue that African morality is founded on African religion and examples of African philosophers who hold this position are J.S. Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, and Moses Makinde. There are also

those who argue that African morality is founded on humanism. Scholars who hold this position includes Kwame Gyekye, Kwasi Wiredu, and Segun Gbadegesin.

We expect that you explain to us the grounds given by Makinde and others to support their position. We expect you to note the fact that the African lives in a religion-bound universe where religion plays a very important role and influences every section of his existence, particularly his social beliefs and cultural ideas. Thus, it is not possible for an African morality to be devoid of religious influence or undertone. This could be supported by the claim that the African needs to separate the good from the evil and the will of God is the source of the knowledge of good and evil. Hence, God is the ultimate source of morality in Africa.

For those who hold that it is humanism, they rejected the position of the first school. We expect you to bring out their argument as regards the fact that African religion is not a revealed one as we have it today and so it is not possible for the people to assess God's commandment. They hold that African morality arose out of human experience as it is meant to guide man's conduct and as such any notion of ascribing African morality is a misplaced one. Morality, for them, is meant to cater for the well-being and interest of men and so it is humans that serve as the basis of the African morality.

SAQ 9.2

We expect you to point out those defining characteristics of African morality.

Some of these features which you may have drawn for includes the fact that the moral system pursues the well-being of the people by ensuring that they live harmoniously and peacefully too. Another is the rejection of ethical egoism (Do you still remember what you learnt in PHI 203) and the promotion of what is called communitarian ethics (the promotion of the interests of the community above that of the individual); there is also the position that the moral system imposes moral responsibility on all and requires that each person builds a good a moral character. To this end, the moral system promotes virtues and condemns vices. We expect that you highlight some of these virtues and vices.

SAQ 10.1

We expect you to note here the fact that the question as regards the existence or otherwise of an African metaphysics is not unconnected to the claim of the Eurocentric views examined in Study Session One where some European thinkers held that Africans were not capable of thinking logically or rationally. In this light, it becomes difficult to imagine then that people can do metaphysics or answer those questions which concern the nature of reality as metaphysics is concerned with.

You are expected to submit that there is indeed an African metaphysics as Africans can think deeply about things that concern them. You must however note the point that it is important that thinking is done in such a way that will make it understandable in other cultures.

SAQ 10.2

There are different themes and features of African metaphysics that you can draw from.

We do not know the features that you have but we hope it covers some of the following. One of the features of African metaphysics is that it is largely empirical although it is viewed as supernatural from the West. Another feature you may note is that African metaphysics does not treat the abstract or unreal but it is based on the perception of reality as determined by factors such as culture, language, history, and worldview of the Africans. Another feature is the hierarchical nature of African metaphysics where God is at the top of the system and living at the centre of the system. Similarly, causality plays a pivotal role in the notion of African metaphysics.

Some of the themes that are important in African metaphysics that you can mention are personhood, destiny, ancestors, witchcraft, and God. We expect you to talk briefly on each of them.

SAQ 11.1

What are the factors that you wrote? Well, we expect that the factors you must have written includes all or some of the following.

One of such factors is that there are divergent African societies with each having his peculiar religious system. Another factor is that African religions are non-scriptural. Also, you may consider that African religion is encompassing as it affects the whole life of the African in all areas. You may also note that it is not easy to translate concepts in African religion to western concepts.

SAQ 11.2

From what you have studied so far here, you will agree that there are four different positions on the philosophy of African religion.

The first position is the claim that the reason why our forbears in Africa practiced religion was just to promote social harmony. The second position rejects this as it claims that the traditional peoples of Africa practiced religion so as to be able to understand themselves and their environment and make sense out of it. The third position holds that for us to understand African religions, we would need to reduce the concepts therein to its western equivalents. The fourth position is that there is a need to decolonize African religions.

SAQ 11.3

God in the two senses differ and we can allude to two examples here. A first example is that God in Africa does not have his existence questioned. Africans do not doubt the existence of God while this is common in the West. Another point is that God is not all-powerful in the African context as we have in the Western sense. For instance, there are witches who could thwart the plan of God for man.

SAQ 12.1

You are expected to note that it is important that you attempt a definition of epistemology before you go on in your analysis of this question. We expect that your definition of epistemology must connote that it is that

branch of philosophy that is concerned with knowing and how we come to know. In this wise, we can refer to African epistemology as the African mode of knowing. We however expect you to argue whether there is a unique way of knowing or not.

Whatever your argument, we expect you to note that there are two sides to the issue and as well bring out the arguments of each side. The first side which is led by Leopold Sedar Senghor holds that there is a unique African mode of knowing. Senghor included this idea in his notion of Negritude. He noted that unlike Europeans, there is a oneness in perception. In other words, there is no separation between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge. In addition to that, Senghor holds that the epistemic subject reacts to the object in an emotive and intuitive manner.

This position of Senghor is rejected by the professional philosophers who opine that the argument for a unique African mode of knowing is an illusion. Wiredu argues that the position subscribed to by Senghor is only a tacit acceptance of the claim of pre-logicality and irrationality levied against Africans. For Wiredu, saying that Africans are emotional in their perception is to say that Africans are actually pre-logical and irrational.

These arguments being noted, we also expect you to point out the sources of African epistemology. Here, we expect you to explain the following sources of knowledge which include oral tradition, premonitive knowledge, ontological knowledge, perceptual knowledge, mystical knowledge, perceptual knowledge, and holistic knowledge.

SAQ 13.1

In answering this, we expect you to take note of the purpose of language. Language is meant for communication and communication plays an important role in our existence as humans. It is communication that helps us in averting crisis and aiding resolution of conflict. It helps you to know what the other person wants and helps you in saying what you want as well. The place of language cannot be under emphasized.

SAQ 13.2

We have established that language is very important to human existence and the same goes for development. How then can African languages be a tool of development? In answering this question, we expect you to look at the positions of African scholars as regards language.

African scholars, we expect you to note, hold that language is the memory bank of the people. It is their medium of remembering and forgetting. Thus, whatever you know is known in your language. In other words, knowledge is impossible without language. Language thus becomes the carrier of culture and the medium of conveying culture from one generation to the other. If this be so, it simply means that our language is the medium of conveying our values and thus an agent of development. But this development will be possible if only our medium of education is in our indigenous language since we learn better in our indigenous language than we do in a foreign language.

There are however obstacles to our indigenous languages.

One of such obstacle is the multi-lingual nature of most states in Africa. Where there are two or more variant languages, which of them will be adopted as the language of the state without creating an atmosphere of insecurity. Similarly, most African languages are poorly developed and so cannot be upgraded to the status that global languages such as French, English, etc. are. Even if we want to resort to translation, the cost of translation is high and many a state in Africa will not be able to attend it. Besides, writing will be limited to a particular audience if it is written in an indigenous language.

SAQ 14.1

Postmodernism is the position that the notion of universal truth and objectivity as we have in traditional epistemology is an illusion. We expect you to look at the origin of postmodernism and the views of African scholars as regards it.

Suffice to mention that traditional epistemology, starting from Descartes attempt to arrive at the indubitable foundation of knowledge up to recent time is targeted at getting a truth that is universal and objective. It is this that serves as the foundation of both the empiricists and the rationalists school in epistemology (we hope you still remember what you learnt in PHI 201). This position is however rejected by the postmodernists who deny the universality of truth but rather believe in its subjectivity. You may discuss Rorty in this regard.

There are different conceptions and reception of this idea of postmodernism. For some African scholars, It requires caution because they wonder why the same western scholars who have touted objectivity and universal truth and have, on that account, disparaged Africans, are now letting off their beliefs. For other sets of African scholars, postmodernism is a continuation of the debate in African philosophy on the existence of a unique African mode of knowing. They hold that postmodernism is pointing out to those African scholars who have denied African epistemology that they have been wrong from the outset.

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