

CONVERSATIONS:

Conversational thinking is articulated as the new approach to philosophical inquiry. It has two strands: conversational philosophy and interrogatory theory with conversationalism and interrogationism as their respective methodic ambience. The former is a method of philosophic thought that involves critical and creative engagement of a philosopher with other actors geared toward increasing literature, developing concepts and building systems, the latter is the methodic ambience of interrogatory theory and is a method of social thought that involves deconstructive and reconstructive engagement of a philosopher with social structures and social agents geared toward building strong social institutions and correcting faulty ones. This journal adopts and promotes this approach to philosophizing for African philosophy. Readers are encouraged to submit their conversational piece (maximum of 2000 words) on any essay previously published in this journal or on any controversial topics, thoughts or authors for publication. The aim is to enhance the evolution of new epistemes in African philosophy. The subject column for the email submissions should read “Manuscript for Conversations”. Enjoy the two conversations in this issue.

Conceptualization:

To converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information. Here, we employ the term in a slightly more technical sense. Philosophical conversation for us is not a mere informal exchange of ideas or a simple informal dialogue between two interlocutors; it is rather a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones. This process involves a ‘creative struggle’ which is the African philosopher’s struggle against the postcolonial imaginary to create systems, new concepts and open up new vistas of thought. Contrast this with ‘destructive struggle’, a fixation on the precolonial originary which destroys any chances of creating something new. Not all philosophic engagements qualify as conversational thinking; for the latter, there are canons and themes that must guide the discourse. Conversational thinking thus is more than a dialogue; it is a rule-guided encounter between proponents (Nwa-nsa) and opponents (Nwa-nju), engaged in protestations and contestations of thoughts in place and in space. A conversational school therefore would be any circle of like-minded philosophers who adopts this approach in their practice of philosophy. For us, in The Conversational School of Philosophy – The Calabar Circle, this should now define not only the new era of African philosophy but the practice of philosophy generally in our Age. We encourage colleagues in other universities to establish their own circles.

DAVID A. OYEDOLA AND THE IMPERATIVE TO DISAMBIGUATE THE TERM “AFRICAN PHILOSOPHER”: A CONVERSATION FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE CONVERSATIONAL SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY – THE CALABAR CIRCLE (CSP)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v4i2.7>

Victor C. A. NWEKE

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Introduction

One of the most enduring questions that survived the Great Debate on African philosophy is the question of the criterion for African philosophy. A number of articles that tend to tackle this controversial question have been published in previous volumes of this journal. The most recent are: Uduma (2014), Segun (2014), Chimakonam (2015b) and Oyedola (2015). The major focus of this work is on how Oyedola’s analysis of the criterion question calls for an explicit definition of who an African philosopher is and this shall be done using the standpoint of The Conversational School of Philosophy – The Calabar Circle also known as The Calabar School of Philosophy (CSP) on the criterion for African philosophy as articulated by Chimakonam (2015a, 2015b, 2015c.). My contention is that the discussions in Oyedola’s article call for the disambiguation of the term African philosopher and that an adequate understanding of the position of the CSP on the criterion for African philosophy makes it easy to identify who an African philosopher is or should be.

On the Position of Oyedola

In line with the editorial policy of [Filosofia Theoretica...], Oyedola’s article, “African Philosophy and the Search for an African Philosopher: The Demise of a Conflictual Discourse”, interrogates the prevailing views of scholars concerning the criteria of the Africanness of a philosophy as well as converses with their authors including Uduma, Segun and Chimakonam (2015a). Although Oyedola did not take an explicit stand on what constitutes or should constitute the criteria of African philosophy, he definitely repudiates the geographical origin criterion, what he refers to as “racial essentialism, regionalism and tribalism” (66), championed by Paulin Hountondji. He also tends to support the logic criterion of Chimakonam. Oyedola was more vocal and definite in his discussion of who an African philosopher is or should be. In my opinion, the unique contribution of Oyedola’s article to the controversial discussion on the criteria for the Africanness of a philosophy is his ability to directly explicate its relationship to the question of *who can or should be called an African Philosopher* – is it: (1) a philosopher from Africa, (2) a philosopher doing philosophy in Africa, or (3) a philosopher doing African philosophy?

Unfortunately, Oyedola's analysis failed to provide an explicit answer to these fundamental questions that are inherent in his paper. This lacuna stems from the fact that he perhaps did not understand that the term "African philosopher" is not just complex but necessarily ambiguous. For he argues that "Many factors could help in making a supposition that the task of knowing who is an African philosopher or who should be seen as an African philosopher, very difficult" (63); yet he un/intentionally writes as if the term African philosopher applies to 1, 2, and 3 above. This can be seen in Oyedola's proposition: "Doing philosophy in Africa may not be necessarily dependent on being an African. A non-African may possess the merit above an African to carry out a discourse or research in African philosophy..." (66). Inherent in this supposition is the equivocation of "doing philosophy in Africa" with "doing African philosophy". Against this backdrop, the article can make someone to conclude that every philosopher that is doing philosophy in Africa as well as the one that is doing African philosophy within or outside Africa can be or should be called an African philosopher. My contention is that this is inaccurate. I shall elucidate this point by explicating as well as disambiguating the ambiguous nature of the term African philosopher. Thereafter, I shall show how the position of the CSP substantiates my thesis.

On the Ambiguity of the term African Philosopher

The ambiguous nature of the term African philosopher is in a sense analogous to the term "South African" in contrast to the term "West African". There are South Africans that are not "South Africans" but there are no West Africans that are not "West Africans". The reason for this is simple: in the southern part of Africa, there is a country called South Africa whereas in the western part of Africa, there is no country called West Africa. Zimbabweans are South Africans in the sense that Zimbabwe is one of the countries in the southern part of Africa; yet they are not South Africans in the sense that they are not citizens of the Republic of South Africa. This situation also applies to the term "America" in contrast to "Europe". Ideally, America should refer to all the countries in two continents of the Western hemisphere, North America and South America, just as Europe refers to all countries in the continent of Europe. However, once America is mentioned, one thinks of the United States of America but when Europe is mentioned one immediately think of all the countries in the continent called Europe. Bearing this in mind, the term "Southern Africa" (as against "South Africa") is used while talking of the southern part of the continent Africa even though the western, eastern, and northern part of the continent are respectively referred to as West, East and North Africa. In the same vein, the term "the Americas" has been coined to disambiguate the term "America". The same thing should be done about the term African philosopher.

The term African philosopher has two distinct senses: 1), it means a philosopher who is from a continent called Africa. 2), it means a philosopher who is doing African philosophy. Used in both senses, it becomes possible to have "African philosophers" that are not "African philosophers". Is this ambiguous? Yes, but it can

be disambiguated. When used in the sense of 1), it refers to philosophers from a continent called Africa but who are not doing African philosophy; when used in the sense of 2), it denotes all philosophers who are doing African philosophy but who may or may not be citizens of countries in the continent of Africa. Ordinarily, this paradox should also apply to terms like Western philosopher but it does not. It is possible to have a non-Western philosopher that is a Western philosopher (by this I mean a philosopher that is neither a citizen of a European or North American country but was trained and/or have demonstrable research competence in a given aspect of European or North American philosophy such as phenomenology, idealism, pragmatism, analysis, existentialism, etc.) but it is impossible to have a “Western philosopher that is not a Western philosopher” (a philosopher that is a citizen of either a European or North American country but was neither trained nor have demonstrable research competence in a given aspect of European or North American philosophy).

At least two reasons can explain why the said ambiguity of the term African philosopher does lead to the paradox “African philosophers” that are not “African philosophers”; while the term Western philosopher, despite being ambiguous does not lead to a similar paradox, “a Western philosopher that is not a Western philosopher.” First, the idea that the pristine African was capable of doing philosophy was vehemently questioned by Eurocentric scholars but the idea of the ability of any European or North American to do philosophy has never been questioned. Second, sequel to the heinous description of the African by most Eurocentric scholars, most early proponents of African philosophy question the ability of non-African scholars to do African philosophy. Though the Eurocentricists did not negate the fact that when given the necessary exposure and training, the African can do philosophy; what they doubted was that the philosophy which the African will eventually produce can be African; it must be Western (European or American). In a crude sense, they argue that philosophy is Western philosophy! In contrast, most of the early proponents of African philosophy un/intentionally argue that, irrespective of exposure and training, no scholar who is not a citizen of a country in Africa can produce African philosophy and as such cannot be an African philosopher. Thus, the term African philosopher is traditionally used exclusively in the sense of 1, a philosopher from the African continent, whereas the term Western philosopher has never been used in an exclusive geographical sense.

Disambiguating the term African Philosopher

Following the universal recognition and participation in the study and advancement of African philosophy as a philosophical tradition in the contemporary world, the position of the early proponents of African philosophy has been shattered. Hence, it is now anachronistic to use the term African philosopher to refer to (1) a philosopher from Africa, (2) a philosopher doing philosophy in Africa, or (3) a philosopher doing African philosophy without qualification. The term African philosopher should now refer only to 3, a philosopher that is doing African philosophy in the sense that he/she

is trained, and/or, has demonstrable research competence in African philosophy. The offshoot of this is that the term African philosopher should not be used to refer to those in either 1 or 2: an African that specializes in any branch of philosophy other than African philosophy, and has no demonstrable research competence in African philosophy and should be called a philosopher from Africa. St. Augustine and William Amo are great philosophers from Africa but definitely not African philosophers just as Martin Heidegger is a great philosopher from Germany but definitely not a German Idealist. St. Augustine belongs to the history of Western not African philosophy. More so, a non-African that specializes in any branch of philosophy other than African philosophy, and has no demonstrable research competence in African philosophy but is teaching or domiciled in the African continent is and should be called a philosopher in Africa not an African philosopher and certainly, not a philosopher from Africa.

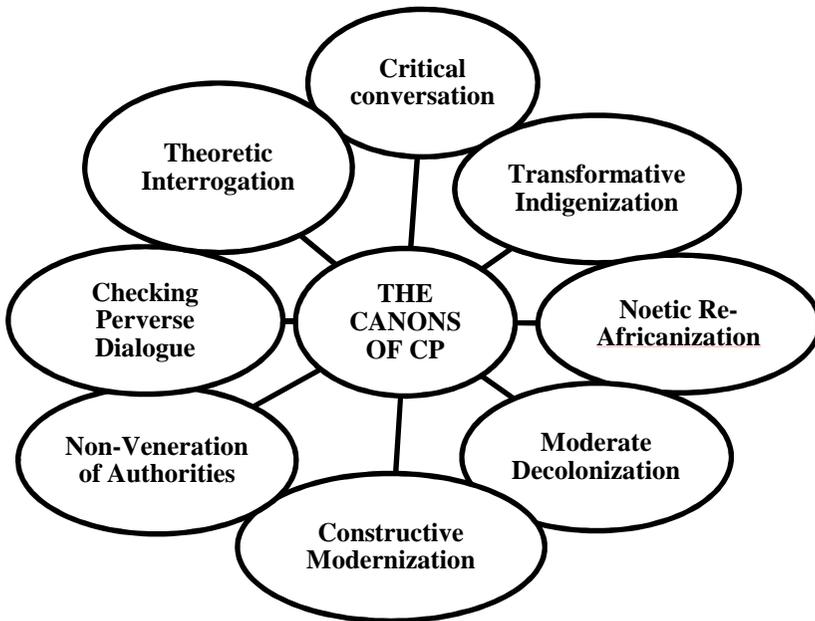
The plausibility of the foregoing proposition springs from the indisputable fact that the professional appellation of a scholar is derived from the scholar's area of training and/or area of demonstrable research competence as against his/her place of origin, place of training or place of practice. A scholar who has a Ph.D or is a professor of German History is not necessarily a scholar that comes from or is trained/domiciled in Germany, but he/she must be a scholar that has shown a demonstrable research competence in the History of the Germans. This is why both Anke Granness and Thaddeus Metz are qualified to be called African philosophers. Anke is a German who did her Masters and PhD research in African philosophy and has been teaching, researching and doing African philosophy in the University of Vienna. Metz, an American, is a Research Professor in the University of Johannesburg who was not trained in African philosophy but has demonstrable research competence in African philosophy; his prolific publications and consistent advancement of a system of "Relational Ethics" from the ambience of African philosophy is challenging. These examples coupled with the fact that although a scholar with a Ph.D in Logic is conventionally expected to become a Professor of Logic, but such a scholar may end up becoming a Professor of African Philosophy instead of Logic if the person's area of demonstrable research competence is more pronounced in African philosophy goes to show that a scholar's appellation is above all, derived from his/her area of demonstrable research competence. So far, the question of what shows that one has demonstrable research competence in African philosophy has been left open.

The Standpoint of the CSP on the Africanness of a Philosophy

What shows that a given philosopher has demonstrable research competence in African philosophy is the quality of his research publications in African philosophy. My contention is that an adequate understanding of the position of the CSP on what makes a particular publication a treatise in African philosophy will help to make the propositions in this paper more vivid.

The CSP is a philosophical movement inspired by the works of P. Iroegbu and I. I. Asouzu but formally articulated and convened by J. O. Chimakonam at the University of Calabar (as a professional body of African and non-African scholars who are committed to doing African philosophy, and/or any aspect of African studies), from the standpoint of the canons of Conversational Philosophy (CP) (see <http://csp.uncial.edu.ng>). Therefore, the CSP or The Calabar School of Philosophy can also be referred to as The Conversational School of Philosophy just as the Vienna Circle is also known as Logical Positivists. The canons of CP are eight and interconnected and can be diagrammatically captured thus:

Fig. 1: Diagram of the canons of the CSP



[For explanation of the canons of CP see Chimakonam (2015c, 26-29)].

Accordingly, the formal position of the CSP on what makes a given philosophical treatise African philosophy is substantially in tandem with the elucidations of Chimakonam (2015a, 101-123, 2015b, 33-50). It emphatically states that a philosophical treatise or position is African if and only if “it is produced with the background logic of African ontology or the instrument of logic tradition in Africa which is dialectical in structure” (CHIMAKONAM 2015a, 106). Against this backdrop, one can validly deduce that the term African philosopher in the strict sense is, and should be used to refer only to scholars with demonstrable evidence of

published philosophical treatises that employ “the background logic of African ontology.”

Relevant Literature

1. CHIMAKONAM, O. Jonathan. “The Criteria Question in African Philosophy: Escape from the Horns of Jingoism and Afrocentrism”, [Atuolu Omalu: Some Unanswered Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy, Jonathan O. Chimakonam Ed.], Pp101-123, 2015a. University Press of America: Lanham. Paperback.
2. ----. “Addressing Uduma’s Africanness of a Philosophy Question and Shifting the Paradigm from Metaphilosophy to Conversational Philosophy”, [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], Vol 4. No 1. Pp33-50, 2015b. Paperback
3. ----. “Conversational philosophy as a new school of thought in African philosophy: a conversation with Bruce Janz on the concept of “philosophical space””. *Confluence: Journal of World Philosophies*], Vol 2. p (3): 9–40, 2015c. Web
4. SEGUN, T. Samuel. “The Prefix “African” and its Implication for Philosophy in Africa,” [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], Vol 3. No 2. Pp106-123, 2014. Paperback
5. OYEDOLA, A. Davad. “African Philosophy and the Search for an African Philosopher: The Demise of a Conflictual Discourse”, [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], Vol 4. No 1. Pp.51-74, 2015. Paperback
6. UDUMA, O. Uduma. “The Question of the “African” in African Philosophy: In Search of a Criterion for the Africanness of a Philosophy,” [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], Vol 3. No 1. Pp127-146, 2014. Paperback