

Discoursing Philosophy through Cultures – Challenges, Opportunities and Dangers

John Ayotunde Isola Bewaji

Introduction

Clashes of cultures, civilizations, ideas and systems are not intrinsically good or bad. They are morally neutral in ways that may defy classical understanding of morality. This does not mean that they do not carry with them loaded moral, social, psychological, and other feelings related to and implicating ethical or unethical behaviour and judgments. In themselves, these are the harbinger of the transcendence of old frontiers and the discovery of new vistas. They are necessary consequences of the interactions of humans from different parts of the same planet that is inhabited by all kinds of sentient beings. Such clashes also take place between other animals that have the need to transcend their immediate geophysical borders to expand the base of resources at their disposal. But increasingly over the last many centuries that humanity has attained the capacity to use tools in attaining goals, the desire and the efforts of one group to foist its ideas, cultures, beliefs, systems of existence and civilization on others, the goals of such efforts are often cloaked in often pretentious, deceptive, highfalutin, impressive-resonance and patently altruistic diction. What has not been too clear is the honesty of humanity to own up up-front to the motives for such efforts, motives which are not always indicated advertorially at the beginning of the interaction of the cultures. It is for this reason that the task of the student of philosophy has often been and continues to be conceived in distrust of human claim to humanity, hatched in skepticism about human capacity to remain human, and nursed on cynicism with respect to the humaneness of human nature, especially when today's powers following in the footpaths of their reprobate forebears claim that all they do is the furtherance of the interest and existence of the weak, dispossessed, marginalized and defenseless, whether they be within the borders of one country or thousands of miles away from one's shores.

One very fundamental way in which this has to be done is through the questioning of the received orthodox views regarding the nature of profession, discipline and practice that give one the interest in reasoning and speculation. This is because, largely, most of the issues that is to be encountered along the journey of understanding the self and others (objectively as agents of knowledge and as persons to interact with and subjectively as selves who phenomenologically must experience reality in similar ways that one does) are clearly benchmarked on issues of survival of self, progeny and culture in an increasingly hostile world where there are no favours without price tags, even though humans have attained expertise in cloaking such narrow interests in grandiose diction of universality of human rights, liberties, democracy, etc.

It is for this reason one has to ask, even for the umpteenth time, and continue to ask again and again, such well-worn philosophical and meta-philosophical questions as: What is philosophy? What is philosophical? In what ways are philosophical issues and ideas generated and/or codified? Must philosophy become a professional discipline and must philosophers become professionals in a narrow sense? Must all humans see and engage philosophy in the same

way? Or, are there geo-culturally determinable ways of understanding and engaging philosophy? To what extent would such relativities of perspective be necessary for the richness of the tapestry of philosophical discourse that we would wish to have within the universal philosophical realm? Why are some geo-political academes able to engage in philosophy with no care as to the immediate relevance of their disquisitions, interests or meaning, while others are, indeed must be, pre-occupied with relevance of what they do, why they do it, and what results can be garnered from their efforts? Is this a curse or a blessing? Who determines whether this is a blessing or curse? Etc., etc., etc.

These are some of the issues, questions and problems that are interrogated in this brief discourse. Thus, in this essay I deign to examine what may be regarded as the peculiarities of philosophy and philosophizing in various cultures against the background of the questions raised above. I do this against the background of what has constituted philosophy in Western, Anglo-American philosophical tradition and the attempt by some to make this tradition *the tradition* for determining the mark of validity, excellence, and robustness of scholarship and discourse in philosophy, by contrast with what is regarded as the practice and praxis in Eastern European, Asian and Pacific, African, Afro-Caribbean and Latino-American philosophical traditions. But I do not raise the questions with any form of oblivion of the fact that many others before me have raised these questions and answered them probably more competently than I could imagine myself capable of. Yet, raising these questions again can only help put in perspective the angst, the ennui and the trepidation that suffuse the intellect of a fringe scholar hoping to make some impression on the pattern of thinking that has dominated philosophical and humanistic scholarship for so long, in the hope that maybe someone is interested in helping to reshape the tenor and direction of human relations to each other in fairer, equitable, just and responsible way in the future.

This has become necessary when one takes a cursory look at the kinds of research and output of Africana philosophers especially over the last five or more decades. This ranges from the efforts of the first Euro-American trained Africana thinkers, on and off African continental soil, to contemporary African thinkers trained on and off African soil, in terms of what the research agenda is, has to be and must be. One immediate outcome of this discourse is the levels of commitment that each tradition pays to its constituency in terms of reflection of realities of thought landscape and existential circumstances of thinkers. The other is the abilities of thinkers to transcend the immediate matters of daily realities to aspire to ethereal issues and "universalism" even if only in superficial terms. This investigation makes possible the realization on a global format the distortions of thought and thinking in various cultures and how these are to be properly understood.

To illustrate this we may, for the sake of argument, take paradigmatic examples from the thoughts of such African and Africanist scholars and statesmen such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Blyden, Garvey, Marley, Nyerere, Nkrumah, Cabral, Fanon, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, Obafemi Awolowo, Leopold Senghor, to John Mbiti, Akin Makinde, Van Sertima, Martin Bernal, Paget Henry, Lewis Gordon, Segun Oladipo and many others. The titles of the publications that constitute the result of their efforts and the content of their philosophical concerns resonate a peculiar form of preoccupation and polemics for the ethnicity issues of their group and progeny. In many cases, the combative nature of the discourses they have

engaged in is determined by existential internalities and externalities of group existence that is defined from perspectives not so clemently disposed to the neutrality of intellectual engagement of problems and issues.

Taking the ploy of the ostrich has never been an option for many African philosophers – burying one’s head in the sand and pretending absence or not being observable – hence there always is a predetermined direction that scholarship tracks. In this regard, one cannot pretend that one’s phenomenological subjectivity is safe, sacrosanct, and protected from challenges from the right, in the light of protestations from diverse quarters of the universal humanity of all humans. As a consequence, even while one may be engaged in apparently universal issues relating to knowledge, wisdom and existence, the tugs of the need to continue to demonstrate one’s humanity pulls into one’s innermost being to requite satisfaction.

In the remainder of this essay, we look comparatively at philosophical agendas from diverse geo-cultural humanistic perspectives, trying to discern the particular and general driving factors for research – Anglo Euro-American, Euro-Asia as in Russian, Continental European, Asian and Pacific. Then we examine the similarities and dissimilarities in the thought processes, interests, arguments, disputes and outcomes of research in these varying and divergent cultural regions. The interest in the section is to understand why philosophical scholarship has been determined that way in these regions. In the final section, we attempt to harness whatever conclusions seem plausible from our effort.

Anthropology as Science of Human Culture and Source of Philosophy, Hermeneutics of Cultures and Positivism of Phenomonological Discourse

Human beings from different cultures do not just interact for commerce or for fun. There takes place other forms of interaction beyond the mere exploratory exchanges about what the other has that will be beneficial to one. In this when interaction comes to play there ensue efforts at an understanding of the other, where there is parity of power and influence. Where there is a perception of inequality of power and influence, various intellectual and practical devices are brought to play to gain the confidence of the other who is in the superior situation or to take advantage of the other when that other is in a defenseless inferior situation.

These forces have always been at play in human interactions from immemorial ages, and they remain sequestered in the subconscious of humanity in what is now described as a global planet where communication would seem to have rendered unimportant great distances of the past. Through various theoretical and applied intellectual disciplines, the interaction of humans have been dotted with theories, hypotheses and ideologies that ingrain in the consciousness and sub-consciousness of humanity various ideas invented accidentally or deliberately to order, maintain and perpetuate inequalities of access and success. Where this is most remarkable is when others have had the privilege of telling the stories of others for them, without the possibility of the other whose story is being told agreeing or disagreeing with the facticity of the story so told. Numerous ways have been found to sanctify and sacralize the stories that are told about others, most important of which is invoking the name of ‘the’ (that is, some) almighty to justify various actions to the other. Intuitively the student of philosophy

must be scandalized to find that humans often forget that whatever she knows today is only a consequence of what others have known in the past, and by implication will be a limiting determinant of that future humans will come to know, even with all the possibilities of irruptions of genius and precocity of intellect of the few.

A number of things demand mention immediately: a) the capacity of humans do delimit the temporal historicity of intellectual and critical thinking in societies one is not familiar with, b) the determination of the kinds of thoughts that are possible in such societies by the teller of the story regardless of patent contradictions these stories portray with regard to what is known of human intellectual efforts universally, c) the use of the resources at the disposal of one's society, culture and politics to make the story stick as *the* truth, d) the teaching of this version of truth to all and sundry as the only truth, especially to the converts to the educational systems of the story-telling people, and e) the self-perpetuating form, shape and reality this version of theory takes even among the persons about whom the story was originally told, though it was a falsehood that should have been so obvious to the subjects (objects) of such theory.

I was originally thinking of using the problems surrounding the definitions of democracy, freedom and liberties as ingress points into the discussion here. But this would seem to pale in significance in comparison to what has happened globally within the last week of January and the beginning of February 2006. While the capitalists who "run things" in the world are assemble somewhere in the Northern Hemisphere, sequestered from all worries about the survival of the poor and impoverished, haggling over what next would be the extraction points for profit, some media editor got it into their head that the only ideal that is sacred and worthy of dying for, because it was a Christian God given right of all humanity is "freedom" of expression or liberties relating to what can be published. And there goes the purveyor of the only truth in the world, with the only instrument that is sanctified – force – to lord it over every facet of humanity, and show all dissenters that they are less than human, publishing the cartoon of the highest humanly conceivable icon of a world religious in the most odious format that the West has even cooked up – a terrorist.

Not even bothering to ask why one set of ideas, ideals, beliefs and ideologies are worth fighting and dying for, they query the humanity and sincerity of those whose ideas, ideals, beliefs and ideologies are different from theirs. Maintaining some strange patronizing aloofness to the feelings of the aggrieved, they affect an air of sanctimonious victimology, pretending to be victim rather than the villain. What is interesting is that how is it so difficult for the West to understand that if they are willing to go to die in Iraq to sell freedom (granting that this is the real motive and not oil or Zionism) why is it difficult to understand that other humans will be willing to hasten their entry into eternity of bliss in defense of the ideas that endow their belief with the possibility of such bliss in the first instance. We are not talking about the truth or falsity of the content of belief here, but merely the existence of competing beliefs, of which none is a priorily endowed with truth that the other similarly lacks. If the ideals of freedom of speech and expression and press are such great ideals divinely bestowed on humans, why is it not possible that faith, in a divine, would also be seen to be deserving of similar respect that freedom is given? Who determines which value is of higher priority?

Clearly any form of violence is to be rejected – whether it is oral or written, whether it be a rarefied intellectual idea that conduces to the destruction of other or simply the dropping of a 500 kilogram low radiation-loaded bunker-bursting laser-guided missile that may have collateral damages of hundreds of humans in a market-place or in a restaurant! Thus, for this writer, it is clear that the Yoruba proverb is genuinely valid – that when a goat is pushed to the wall, it will bite! And for the majority of humanity who have watched the minority take and take from them with no respite, only to be told that what little which makes like tolerable for them does not hold up to the measure of humanity, then it cannot be surprising if such masses take things into their own hands to do justice whichever way they see fit. This is why the destruction of lives and property upon the desecration of the name of the Prophet Mohammed makes sense. And this was long in coming, as various efforts, subtle and overt, have been orchestrated to inflame the feelings of Muslims around the world.

Clearly the matter is as convoluted as it can get. Consider an Islamic press depicting the Christian Messiah, the only Son of God, Jesus the Christ, as a vagabond, as a vagrant, a male of no fixed address, who roam the streets with a ragamuffin band of layabouts, living from hand to mouth from dust-bins and on the generosity of other hard-working members of society while claiming to have myriads of probably substance induced visions about a new world and the end of the world and about the of time that such an end shall dawn. What would the religious Christian think, say or do in such highly provocative, volatile and incendiary circumstance? Surely some will probably go on a retreat, have an incense filled, holy spirit blessed congregation and pray for the soul of the offender, while some will take vengeance into their own hands to summarily liquidate the offender in the name of God – as has happened with attacks on abortion clinics, KKK attacks of not so distant past in the greatest land of the free (USA) and the burning at the stake of witches and sorcerers in Europe in no distant past! Would the sanctimonious Western Press hold the same kind of Freedom of Expression and Speech as superior to Freedom of Religious Belief? If there are God-given rights, can humans disrespect the prophets who brought the faith that gave meaning to the idea of creation from which the God-given rights derive?

With that digression taken in hand, let us look at what has been happening within the intellectual heritage of humankind for the past hundreds of years. From Biblical times the easiest ploy to destroy a people, civilization or culture is to brand it as odious, ungodly, irrational, unnatural, inhuman, or even primitive. Once this is done, no further excuse is required to warrant whatever harm is done to those among whom the practice, belief or culture is found. The Promised Land was not vacant land. But to justify the destruction of the original owners of the land, the idea of their not cooperating with the theft of their property, as ordained by the occupier's god, was mooted. This incurred the wrath of the God of the occupiers. In the New World even as the new immigrants were busy developing ideas about their eternal rights to equality and freedom from the oppressive yoke that was Empire taxes on them, they were in the same breath destroying the rights of the original owners of the Americas and also the identity, dignity and personhood of the blacks forcibly imported into the fields and mines. While in most parts of Africa the conspiracy of yellow fever and other tropical diseases prevented the total expropriation of the continent, yet what could not be taken by brute force and subterfuge was taken through the use of a combination of educational, religious, economic, psychological, and other disingenuous activities. In Southern parts of Africa, which was more

temperate in climate and geography, there developed a pernicious settler community of racists and depraved subhuman land-grabbers. This led to so many years of ferocious nationalism and wars of independence in the Southern African region. The war is not yet over, as the next phase of the war is being fought now in the legal trenches and in the parliamentary trenches, to redeem what was stolen from the African peoples in the region. But the stakes are so high, and the stage has been set for so much antagonism on all sides that it is difficult to see how this situation can be resolved amicably, as those used to undeserved opulence would not give up the unjust opulence without some serious fight to protect even their unjust advantages.

This is where the subtitle of this section is immediately relevant. For we see at play ‘Anthropology as Science of Human Culture and Source of Intercultural Philosophy, as the Hermeneutics of Cultures and midwife of Positivist Phenomenological Discourses’. It is the leadership of societies that take deliberate decisions to underwrite in intellectual lingo the ideals that impel their efforts to guarantee sustained resources for their societies. There is always a pernicious our-theirs dichotomy at play in all interface of human foreigners, a destructive suspicion that drives the interfacing persons and groups to take evasive, self-protective, but other-destructive action. And there must be those who are able to justify, rationalize, and defend the most horrendous actions of persons and groups against others, because the human conscience finds it difficult to naturally accept the treatment of others as one would not like oneself to be treated – even in spite of the Hobbesian state of nature in which life is “nasty, brutish and short”.

When the intellectual agents of the various interfacing societies and groups undertake efforts to understand the new peoples they have to interact with, theories have to be developed. These ranged from the Hamitic hypothesis to the economic theories of capital and property developed by Adam Smith and echoed by Jack Goody to justify theft of land in various parts of the world, to inferiority theories of some members of one’s society as in the Platonic *Republic* with the stratification of citizens according to “intellectual” portion and vocations for which they are suitable and the racialization of ethnicities making them suitable only for servitude.

The efforts of the various “scholars” who followed the explorers, colonizers, traders, missionaries, etc. to African and other places to understand and make understandable to their peoples at their home bases have been celebrated enough by scholars from a diversity of intellectual disciplines. What we are yet to fully understand is how far-reaching the theories these “scholars” have spurned have been, and how these theories still continue to determine what constitute knowledge and truth in the world today. It is even more relevant in understanding why peoples outside the concentric rings of power and dominance are perpetually determined to be preoccupied with issues of cob-web clearing for ever from their intellectual closets, to ride the closets of the negative dirt of intellectual squalor that they have been blessed with by the scholars of the metropolises.

This is why I have suggested that there seem to be an unending task of “claiming” knowledge, truth and science for one’s kind becomes a meta-task that substitutes for the real task of generating knowledge, truth, and science. This is why, for example, in spite of my personal interest in epistemology as a sub-division of philosophy, I have been engaged in numerous issues in Africana philosophy, religion, political philosophy and ethics. As the Yoruba proverb

says, “if lice still infest the cloth, blood must remain under the finger nails”, when challenges to the humanity of oneself persist, efforts at self-affirmation become primary. Until the apostles of racism, racialism and oppression become educated or extinct, the attention of Africana scholars must remain riveted to the defense and affirmation of the humanity and cultural advancement of Africana peoples, writ large. This is why a sample of the titles of publications by Africana philosophers remains polemical, belligerent and pugnacious. This explains why the inaugural Cave Hill Symposium in 2005 was devoted to the improbable task of defining what is Philosophy, what is Caribbean Philosophy, what is Africana Philosophy and whether what Africana peoples ever do can ever be philosophical – rather than say ethno-philosophical or folklorist! I took issue with the theme then, and I still do now, even more ferociously than is natural for philosophers who are supposed to be measured in their contemplations and reactions to situations and things (peoples)! This is why Wamba Dia Wamba has been locked in a life and death struggle in the Congo with the forces of inhumanity of humans to humans!

While Anglo Euro-American students of philosophy are able to undertake a devotion to abstractions like the meaning of “numbers”, theories of “types” and “descriptions”, meaning of “implication” in the “bi-conditional” logical sign and whether there is life on Pluto, given the cultural denial and degradation of the African intellect, the Africana scholar must be concerned about whether there is philosophy in her historical antecedents, whether Africans even developed intellectual ideas about the origins, ends, and ultimate reality of the universe! She must be reminded every day that to even be allowed to pretend to be doing philosophy is a huge step from the proper place to which she should have been confined – under the table scrounging for crumbs while the Mistresses are busy entertaining multiple partners at the same time in the presence of the Master of the house in voyeuristic indulgence of absolute perfidy. The scholars for Euro-Asia – as in Russian, Continental European, and indeed Asian are allowed to be witnesses to this macabre dance as she is allowed the high title of a lower partner in the claim to humanity, only by some accident of being co-conspirators in the denudation of the heritage of other. While scholars from the far East and the Pacific indigenous peoples must be watched carefully lest they assume airs that are not real. In the next section we illustrate our argument in this section to show the futility of trying to convince those who already made up their minds about one’s inferiority that maybe one is no less human than they!

Philosophical and Intellectual Scholarship Globally

Let me begin this section by providing some quotes from some sources which illustrate the pain that one feels when one reminisces periodically about the similarities and dissimilarities in the thought processes, interests, arguments, disputes and outcomes of research in terms of content, direction of research, preoccupation of research, evaluation and outlet opportunities of the research in these varying and divergent cultural regions of the world. As indicated earlier the interest in the section is to understand why philosophical and intellectual scholarship in the humanities has been determined the way they have in these regions, why educated persons in Africa and the Africa Diaspora has no confidence in their own traditions and cultures, why there is so much out-sourcing of knowledge, expertise and intellect in these Africana societies and why regardless of how high an Africana intellectual may achieve, there is always a

deference, bordering on subservience to the Euro-American models of life, culture, civilization and intellectual affirmation. We start with one of the foremost “educationists” of Nigeria, the internationally recognized Professor D. A. Balogun. In a co-authored text titled *Principles and Practice of Education* (1981), they write:

The impact of the West has also largely done away with practices like cannibalism, the killing of twins and human sacrifices. These practices were not common, but their occasional occurrence provided enough grounds for Western societies to look down upon African culture. Western education also created a new class of educated people who could understand each other’s point of view and could overcome tribal and local differences more easily than those who were not educated. By mastering foreign ideas and concepts, communication with foreigners became easier. Even the struggle for freedom in many countries, including Nigeria, was helped by the acquaintance with the Western concepts of democracy, equality and justice.

There is no need to emphasize any portion of the odious quote, as all that is inherent in the quote is nauseating and heartrending to the extreme. It not only shows that Africa is indeed lost, but that redemption of Africa does not rest with the “educated” group that parade around in various foreign endowed toga of academic excellence. In fact, the best one can do is to band together all these intellectuals and ship them to any new plantation that the White Man may deign fit for them, so that they could realize the horror of the virus of Euro-philia that infested their being at the utter detriment of their great forebears.

What is wrong with Balogun and his accomplices? Too many things, of which we mention the following:

a) The statement that “The impact of the West has largely done away with practices like cannibalism, killing of twins and human sacrifices” only repeat the justification for the invasion of African cultural heritage, giving it bad names and interpretations in order to destroy what was good in African culture. No doubt cannibalism was practiced in some societies in Africa and is still practiced in some, even today. No doubt twins were killed because they were regarded as abnormal births in some societies and humans were sacrificed in some parts of Africa. These practices still take place in parts of Africa today, regardless of the contact with the West or the East, with the exception of probably the killing of twins. What is significant is that cannibalism is still practiced in other cultures in the West and East, as shown by the case of the Internet cannibal in Germany recently. And the West also indulge in wanton human sacrifices in the form of wars of aggression in the Baltic region under the guise of ethnic cleansing, just as happened in Rwanda and in the wars waged on Islamic societies under the name of war on terror! While one is not justifying any of these evils, they were not universal in Africa, nor were they general practices among all African societies.

b) That “Western education also created a new class of educated people who could understand each other’s point of view and could overcome tribal and local differences

more easily than those who were not educated”. Oops! This is very strange, as it takes a technical concept of “education” in the sense of attending Western type classroom instruction as education, and regards those who did not attend such artificially structured institutions as uneducated and therefore as less fortunate and incapable of discerning right from wrong, as if there had not been inter-ethnic trade, dealings and cultural exchanges before Western education ever found its way into the lives of Africans. And what kind of understanding does the authors mean? Are we to laud the kind of “understanding of each other” that has made Nigeria ungovernable, only to be ruled by greedy egotists who have constituted themselves into what Wole Soyinka has called the “wasted generation”, but which I call the “wasting generation and their scions”? What accounts for the education that has created Rwanda? What explains the situation in the Congo? What can justify what is happening in the Darfour region? Are African and their Diaspora educated persons able to resolve differences in any way similar to what African culture shorn of Western education indicates?

c) What do the authors mean in saying “By mastering foreign ideas and concepts, communication with foreigners become easier”? Does it mean that the “educated” Africans are now better able to sell their kith and kin into perpetual servitude through their communication with the foreigners? Who needs foreign ideas and concepts to communicate if you have something worthwhile to communicate? Do the Japanese, Chinese, Indians or even the Northern Koreans need foreign ideas and concepts to communicate with any foreigner?

d) Then they conclude that “Even the struggle for freedom in many countries, including Nigeria, was helped by the acquaintance with the western concepts of democracy, equality and justice”. This is very odd in the extreme. Most of us academics only pretend to education when all we have attained is simple capacity to mimic the puppet masters in all their ways and sayings. How any one knowledgeable in the history, traditions and cultures of the Yoruba people could make struggle for freedom something to be derived from exogenous sources is ludicrous. And then it is freedom from those who preach freedom that one has to struggle for. If the West understood freedom and priced it so much, why would they enslave or colonize others, and the others would now have to use “learned” ideas of the West to regain what they had before they were colonized. Just as Orlando Patterson has suggested, it is those who proclaim most freedom who are most guilty of riding roughshod over the freedom of other humans. This is why Fela Anikulapo Kuti’s rhetorical song about how the army cannot now grant human rights to civilians is apposite here. As it were, Balogun and his ilk are victims of intellectual dysfunction that makes it impossible for African intellectuals to see beyond their very myopic noses to understand how the world works. Compare this with how an outsider sees Japanese people, education, culture and realities of existence. According to Merry White,

The visible outcome of Japanese education and child rearing include stunning literacy rates, a highly sophisticated general population, and a well-socialized and committed work-force. Less than 0.7 per cent of the Japanese population is illiterate compared to 20 percent in the United States. An example of uniform

effects of education may be seen on ordinary television news broadcasts: the level of discourse, sophisticated analysis of facts and figures and the general tone of reporting is striking, approximated only on some American “educational television”. Furthermore, this sophistication is not restricted to the upper socioeconomic strata. A worker on the factory floor can understand graphs, charts, and other symbolic notations and work with complex mathematical formulas.

We need not look far to understand why. It is because Japanese leadership did not allow the substitution of Western intellectual waste for excellence and the derision of indigenous knowledge and technology as evidence of academic attainment. It is also clear that the Japanese leadership were clear where individual success, group identity and integrity rested and never compromised on the need to remain grounded in Japanese ideas and cultures. This is also because,

We need to understand the Japanese schools and the experience of the Japanese child as rooted in deep psychological and cultural realities; in borrowing European and American models of schooling *Japan did not borrow Western conceptions of learning and childhood*. **In Japan, to be modern is not, in any pervasive sense, to be Western.**

These words speak for themselves and need no additional embellishment. But it seems that in the case of Africana leadership, in most cases, we are inured to a sense of self, group and communal defacement. We are so much skewed in our understanding of reality and existence and the world that we are the instruments for the destruction of our civilizations, histories, societies, cultures, political institutions, religious traditions, educational institutions and personal and group identities. With leaders like this, who needs enemies at the gate? What the enemy needs to do will clearly be done by the homegrown Western educated parasite that are called leaders in the Africana societies.

Now, historians are way ahead of philosophers when it comes to how the intellectual history of Africa is depicted. Through a combination of scientific evidence garnered from archaeology, written and oral documents, they have been able to arrive at a meaningfully sustaining history of African civilizations from as far back as 10,000 years (Davidson 1995). This would indicate many things to students of philosophy, of which a significant one would be the need to raise many questions as to how, why and what of the civilizations that developed in these “pre-historic” times. Arguably raising these questions would not be an end in itself, but it would at least signal to the world that as Africana thinkers we are not immune to querying the received views that continue to determine our negativist ideas about Africa and Africana peoples. If we compare then the notion of Africana intellectual and philosophical heritage embraced by Africana philosophers to those of historians, we see a remarkable diversity that cannot be explained. Historians like Davidson acknowledge that there can be no great civilization, such as is there in Zimbabwe, West Africa, the Congo, etc. without serious intellectual capital to drive it. But Africana philosophers, from continental to new world, maintain some archaic diffidence regarding the intellectual and philosophical heritage of their progeny.

Richard Bell says, “There is not what could be called a “philosophical tradition” that can be traced back very far historically in most of the continent. So the issues in “understanding” – cultures and philosophies – are complex” (2002: ix). What does he mean by this? How can this be the case when traditions of great advancements in science, technology, medicine and social and political engineering indicate otherwise and historians acknowledge this much? Who is lacking in imagination here – the historian or the philosopher? Fasoro speaks of tracing “philosophy to its early years in Miletus” (2002: 1). Having had so many years of intellectual adulteration make such a huge difference to how Africana peoples perceive themselves and their heritage. As Fanon suggested, most of our intellectuals and leaders today would seem to need serious intellectual psychiatric help, not of the kind that is available in orthodox medical avenues to treat clinical depressions or mental malfeasance (as the problems that needs attention are not the kinds that drive persons to become domiciled on the streets on cities and towns and is popularly called madness), but one steeped in traditional African culture, to cure the mind of the double tragedy of human self-deprecation that colonialism, slavery, dysfunctional education and racialist world religion has inflicted on the Africana psyche! (Fanon 2001). This advice goes for many Africana thinkers like Balogun above, and Makinde, Bodunrin, Fasoro and many others. Makinde, for example says,

If a philosopher in one culture sets a higher standard of philosophizing than some others in other cultures, it is because one culture sets a higher standard of education, knowledge, moral and social values than some other culture, the practical ends of which would be the training of peoples to be good members of the society (1988: 15).

He would further think that African languages, science, philosophy and scholarship generally are late starters, and need time to develop to have any chance of competition with other intellectual disquisitions from other regions of the world. This is a remarkable evidence of the limitations imposed on the mind by Western education, which makes it difficult to ask important questions or to provide creative answers to the ones that are raised to reflect any modicum of historicity and facticity.

I will end this segment with a few additional pointers to show why I am so concerned about how professional philosophers of the Africana descent have become emasculated by the forces of opposition that has subjugated the intellect of themselves and their forebears for so long. The point then will be to see if current generations will not be determined like the leopards and the spots that cannot be changed, and whether future generations of Africana intellectuals and leadership will take heed and decide that “enough is enough”, and that it is time to claim what is deserved for one’s progeny – respect!

The view of Eastern Europe and Asia in the West is not different from how Africa and peoples of colour are viewed in the West. Consider for example the monumental volumes on *Russian Philosophy* edited by James M Eddie et al (1976) prefaced with the following opener:

Russian philosophy has always been decidedly *man-centered*. From the beginnings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and into the post-Revolutionary emigration, certain themes have remained constant: the problem

of good and evil in individual and social life, the meaning of individual existence, the nature of history. Russian thinkers turned late, and hesitantly, to such technical disciplines as logic, theory of knowledge and philosophy of science. Even metaphysics and philosophical theology, as practiced in Russia, were intimately linked to ethics, social philosophy and the philosophy of history (1976: ix).

There are many implications of this. The first is the cast of inferiority that is emblazoned on the Russian intellect from the very start. This means that Russian philosophy fails to meet the high standards of “philosophy”. And for this reason, Russian philosophers need counseling in order for them to develop comparative, rigorous philosophical documents like their Western counterparts. But the questions that Eddie et al fail to even consider are myriad. For one, is it possible to have any understanding of “good and evil” without any epistemological conception of **how we know** what is good from what is evil? Or, whether good or evil exist intrinsically or only parasitically on the cultures in which they are discussed? What would “existence” mean in individual existence without attention to metaphysics? Can any theory of identity and history have meaning without attention to logic?

When Paget Henry (2000) indicated in *Caliban’s Reason* that Caribbean Philosophy is at best in its infancy, it is the same kind of intellectual disease that is spread by colonialism and slavery that afflict the appraisal of the intellectual traditions of the Caribbean by Henry. And in the words of Serequeberhan (1991), we need to get beyond this myopia, stop celebratory adulation of oppression and put behind us the putative inability to repose confidence in our own heritage – the good, the bad and the ugly inclusive, as all cultures, civilizations and ethnicities have a surfeit of them to learn from. While the attention of Serequeberhan was directed at African intellectuals and ruling elites, it is clear that his words are also fitting as a description of the attitude and actions of Africana intellectuals and leaders generally. He says,

As Edward Said correctly points out, the result of colonialism in the colonized world was “a widely varied group of little Europes in Asia, Africa and the Americas”. The “little Europes” constituted on the African continent required replication of European institutions and forms of life and the simultaneous depreciation and suppression – as barbaric, savage, nonhuman – of African institutions and culture. They also required the systematic inculturation of urbanized Africans, whose very formation as a section of the dominated society was predicated on the rupture of African historical existence in the face of European violence. Thus, the Europeanized sections of colonized Africa were physically and culturally disinherited. The non-Europeanized sections, on the other hand, were forced to submit to a petrification of their indigenous cultural and historical existence (1991: 8).

Thus, in my own humble submission, based on my familiarity with the ideas, views, thoughts, political, economic and critical discourses of Africana thinkers, there is no way of absolving them of complicity in the parlous state of our societies intellectually, morally, spiritually, economically, politically and culturally. It is the direction of the searchlight on this category of people, who owe an obligation to lead their peoples, that we need to focus attention on

suggesting a serious re-education for them, so that they cease to see themselves as surrogates of their (slave/colonial) masters who pull the strings.

Concluding Remarks

In this final section, we attempt to harness whatever conclusions seem plausible from our tentative effort at understanding what forces, factors and conjoinment of accidents determine the fate, destiny, identity, themes, content, direction, purpose, goals and character of intellectual and philosophical discourse in Africana societies even at the beginning of the 21st Century. Last year when the first edition of this Symposium was held, I had sent in a small essay indicating my strong reservation regarding what I thought was a waste of time and resources looking at the question whether Caribbean Philosophy existed or not. I raised many issues to indicate that the failure of academic philosophers to teach Caribbean Philosophy is not to be regarded as a proof of the non-existence of Caribbean Philosophy but a scandal in the intellectual life of scholarship in the region. I took to task Paget Henry and others who are of the view that Caribbean Philosophy is either non-existent or in its infancy. I offered as proof of the existence of Caribbean Philosophy since early in the history of what is known as the Caribbean texts, ideas, and theories embedded in the lives and material culture of the Caribbean people which are worthy of scholarly research.

In this discussion, I have examined why old habits of the mind die hard. I have shown that part of the difficulty faced by Africana societies is the weakness or failure of leadership – intellectual, cultural, political, economic and philosophical. While it may be difficult to expect that “closure” (that American fad) cannot be simply put to things like prejudice overnight, it is the hope of this writer that time seems to be here now to understand the need for proper re-education and retooling of Africana intellectual capital to facilitate the transcendence of the narrow agendas that have been formulated for peoples of colour exogenously by those who would want the self-fulfillment of predications of intrinsic intellectual incapacity of peoples of colour, abetted by mentally and intellectually enslaved Africana thinkers and leaders who fail to see that they are mere puppets in the scheme of things facilitating the continued domination and pauperization of their heritage by the forces of oppression from the West.

In a very unorthodox way of concluding a discussion like this, I want to leave the reader with questions to think about: If, as research has shown, there were ancient civilizations in Africa before the advent of the most recent interface with Europeans, could such civilizations have existed without theories of governance, social relations, economics, and politics? Could we assume that there were no ideas about right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust, fair and unfair? Did such civilizations exist without ideas of truth relating to what claims members of society made? Did they ever wonder how it was that people knew things by contrast with why some others are ignorant of such things? Did they ever wonder about origins of things such as humanity, the universe, what things are made of, ends of things as they are known, source of life, end of life, etc? Did they ever find it interesting to ask why are some male and others female, why only females seem able to become pregnant, why descendants of the same ancestry resemble and others (including ‘jackets’) different?

I will not answer these questions, as I believe the answer is already contained in the discussion before these questions were posed. The point of our discussion is that we put an end to mindless depreciation and deprecation of the traditions and cultures of Africana peoples on the one hand, and on the other, that Africana peoples need to wake up to the realities of contemporary existence, which is a product of the realities that enslaved them and colonized them – effects of which have become most incurable in the intellect of the leadership of Africana peoples especially.

References:

Balogun, D. A. et al. 1981. *Principles and Practice of Education*. Lagos, Nigeria: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers.

Bamikole, Lawrence O. 2002. *Essays in Comparative Philosophy*. Lagos, Nigeria: Majab Publishers.

Bell, Richard 2002. *Understanding African Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.

Bewaji, J. A. I. 1985. “African Beliefs” in Oyeneye and Soremi eds. *Nigerian Life and Culture*. Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria. Pp. 307-360.

- 1992. “A Critical Analysis of the philosophical status of Yoruba Ifa Literary Corpus”. *Weiner Reihe* Vol. VI, pp. 142-155.
- 1998. “Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief and the Problem of Evil” in *African Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 4 (Electronic Journal).
- 2002. “Language, Culture, Science, Technology and Philosophy” in *African Philosophy – Journal on African Philosophy*. <http://www.africanphilosophy.com/vol1.1/bewaji.html>.
- 2003. *Beauty and Culture – perspectives in Black Aesthetics*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- 2003. “If my people must go, they will have to find their way by themselves – Critical comments on Wim Van Binsbergen’s *Ubuntu and the Globalisation of Southern African Thought and Society*” in *South African Journal of Philosophy*. Volume 22, No 4, pp. 378-287.
- 2003. “Beyond ethno-philosophical myopia – Critical comments on Mogobe B. Ramose’s *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*” in *South African Journal of Philosophy*. Volume 22, No 4, pp. 388-401.

- 2004. "Philosophy in History and History of Philosophy as Academic Politics" in Liubava Moreva (ed.) *UNESCO International Readings on Theory, History and Philosophy of Culture*. Number 18: Differentiation and Integration of World Views – Philosophical and Religious Experience. Moscow. Pp. 194-234.
- 2004. "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture" in Kwasi Wiredu (ed) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, New York: Basil Blackwell Press, pp. 396-403.
- 2005. "Philosophical Exploration of Leadership in Caribbean and Diaspora Politics", *Journal on African Philosophy. An Electronic Journal of International Society for African Philosophy and Studies*. At site: <http://www.africanphilosophy.com/issue2/bewaji.html>.

Davidson, Basil 1995. *Africa in History*. New York: Touch Stone Books.

Eddie, James M. et al 1976. *Russian Philosophy* Vol. 1. Knoxville, USA: University of Tennessee Press.

Fanon, Frantz. 2001. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Penguin.

Lewis R. Gordon, 1997. *Her Majesty's other children*. Lanham, USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

- 1997. *Existenz in Black*. New York: Routledge.

Henry, Paget. 2000. *Caliban's Reason*. New York: Routledge.

Hord, F. L. and Jonathan S. Lee. Eds. 1995. *I am because we are*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Horton, Robin. 1993. *Patterns of thought in Africa and the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mills, C. W. 1997. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- 1998. *Blackness Visible*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Mosley, Albert 1995. *African Philosophy*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Nettleford, Rex. 1978. *Caribbean Cultural Identity*. Kingston: Institute of Jamaica.

Rodney, W. 1982. *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Washington DC: Howard University Press.

Serequerbehan, Tsenay. 1991. *African Philosophy – the Essential Readings*. New York: Paragon House.

Van Sertima, I. 1993. *African Presence in Early Europe*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

- 1991. *Blacks in Science*. New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Books.

White, Merry. 1987. *The Japanese Educational Challenge*. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Wilson, Carlton. 1997. "Conceptualizing African Diaspora". *The Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Vol. XVII No. 2.