SAGE PHILOSOPHY AND ETHNO-PHILOSOPHY: THE DIFFERENCES?

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Abstract
Sage philosophy and ethno-philosophy are not different. Sage philosophy is merely a modification of ethno-philosophy, and as well faces the same critical challenges as ethno-philosophy, as group philosophy. Tempel's Bantu Philosophy is regarded as the first systematised work on African philosophy. What constitutes African philosophy remains a major concern. Ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy, national ideological philosophy and professional philosophy are trends in its study. This paper critically examines ethno-philosophy, which defines African philosophy as a study of the chronicled worldviews, beliefs, myths, folklors, folk wisdom, traditions and cultures of the African people. Critics view ethnophihosophy as 'group' philosophy, which negates the basic characteristic of philosophy as an articulation of the thoughts or ideas of an individual. Sage philosophy became therefore, a response to, and a reformation of ethno-philosophy. It consists in identifying individuals in society reputed for their profound insights and wisdom by the trained philosopher, who engages these men, referred to as sages and weaves their ideas and wisdom into a coherent matrix of thought. The question that arises therefore from the sage-philosopher interaction is, whom do we refer to as the progenitor of the said interaction? Is it the sage or the trained philosopher? If the idea belongs to both the sage and the trained philosopher, then we return to the same problem of African philosophy as 'group' philosophy.

Introduction
The enterprise referred to as African Philosophy began with the publication of Placid Temple's Bantu Philosophy and John Mbiti's African Religions and Philosophy, which elicited the debate on the existence or otherwise of a discipline called African philosophy. The intellectual world was thus divided in argument between those who believe there is no African philosophy; those who accepted the existence of African philosophy but merely in her recent history; and those who argues philosophy has always been part of the African experience, that even the acclaimed originators of philosophy were only showing a set of copied ideas from the African world. These divisions and philosophic ptolemics have however largely been set aside as scholars have come to the point of, "settling down to doing African philosophy" (Okafor :251-267). Since there has been a meeting point by scholars, that African philosophy can atleast be studied in contemporary scholarship, the new questions arising therefore are: what is the subject matter and the method to adopt in the study of African philosophy? It was in response to these that Odera Oruka identified four approaches in the study of African philosophy. These include: Ethno-Philosophy, Philosophical Sagacity, National Ideological Philosophy and Professional Philosophy or the Universal approach.

Ethno-philosophy regards the study of African philosophy from the chronicling of African myths, folklors and folkwisdom, believing that through this process, access will be made to the collective world views and philosophical insights of the African people (Udoidem :103-104). Philosophical Sagacity attempts to identify people in traditional African societies reputed for their folk wisdom by a researcher who engages them, guides and develops philosophical ideas from this encounter. National ideological philosophy involves a search to evolve new and unique social and political theories based on traditional African consciousness and familyhood in the wake of colonialism and national independence agitations (Udoidem :103). The universalist approach views philosophy as a multicultural activity and so regards African philosophy in the words of Bodurin as "the philosophy done by
Africans, whether it be in the area of logic, metaphysics, ethics or history of philosophy” (Udoiedem :103). Proposing this position further, Bodurin avers that what qualifies one as an African philosopher is the birth place of the individual and not the content of his works. Therefore, any work by an African philosopher becomes African philosophy flowing from this argument. There are divers arguments and propositions regarding the content and method to the study of African philosophy as enumerated by Oruka. However, this paper is limited to the approaches of ethno-philosophy and philosophical sagacity and the contending arguments thereto. It is argued that sage philosophy is a reformation and an improvement on ethno-philosophy because of the arguments which questions the authenticity of ethno-philosophy, debasing it and relegating it to the background as group philosophy which can not be regarded as philosophy in the strict sense, as the product of the logical, rational thought process of an individual. Sage philosophy therefore came as a response to free African philosophy from it critics, as group philosophy, with a method which now credits the developed ideas from the encounter between the sage and the trained philosopher to the sage, and as such frees African philosophy from the toga of that belonging to a group or which is ethnic related.

The main problem in the reformation process from ethno(group) to sage is that which raises the question of the originality of the idea between the sage and the researcher. Is the idea emanating from the encounter free from same criticisms bearing in mind the difficulties involved in translating the original ideas of the sage into readable philosophical forms? If those difficulties are granted and we concede to the arguements that the ensuing idea from the encounter incorporates concepts and personal ideas of both the sage and the reseracher, is it now not safe to conclude that sage philosophy is the same thing as group philosophy? Is it not safe to say that philosophical sagacity is not different from ethno-philosophy? These are some of the questions we wish to respond to in this work. The work is therefore aimed at resolving the contending issues raised between sage philosophy and ethno-philosophy, using the library method of analysis of existing literature and subjecting these to further critical examination were a conclusion shall be drawn. In view of the above, we shall make clear the concepts of Ethno-Philosophy and Philosophical sagacity in our next analysis before justaposing them and making critical comments.

What Is Ethno-Philosophy?
Ethno-philosophy is a “term coined by Paulin J. Hountondji and employed derogatively to discredit the works of Temples and Mbti and other works of similar orientation in African philosophy” (Okafor :251). Ethno-philosophy seems to be a rejoinder on the nature of African philosophy. It denotes and refers to the folk wisdom and philosophy of a people in terms of the customs, traditions, and religious beliefs of a specific people in Africa, premised on the assumption that there is a metaphysical and ideological system embodied in the traditional wisdom and the institutions of the various African people (Deacon :98). The main focus of Ethno-philosophy is the elements of philosophical thought that underlie the patterns of life and the belief system of a given people. The essential characteristic of this trend, according to Odera Oruka is that, “it requires a communal consensus. It identifies with the totality of custom and common beliefs of a people. It is also a thought, impersonal: it is not identified with any particular individual(s). It is a philosophy of everybody” (Okafor). Okafor argues further that;

Ethnophilosophy is also characterised as “folk philosophy” because it is said to be an articulation of a communal philosophy that is embedded in the traditional worldview or thought system of any particular African community- or the whole of Africa. Put another way and in a more universal context, it is a reflection on the worldview and an unveiling of the thought system, or way of thinking of a particular community within a cultural region or of the entire region. …ethnophilosophy has a folk nature
to the extent that it is an exposition of the elements of the philosophical thought
that undergird the way of life of a people as collectivity. Thus, “folk philosophy” as a
composite, qualifying term refers to the nature of a philosophy that emerges from
the philosophical enterprise of ethnophiophers (Okafor :363).

Okafor further states that ethno-philosophy is essentially speculative, while not focusing on
the universals as its object of enquiry, but the reasoning or thinking that underlie the
existential outlook and the way of life of a particular people as a cultural group. These are
carefully obtained by the means of philosophical reflection and deductive reasoning (Okafor
364). This argument is premised on the note that critics refer to ethno-philosophy as nothing
more than anthropology. He states that while ethno-philosophy is related to anthropology in
so far as political philosophy relates to political science, but it is much more than the later;
ilinguistic philosophy relates to language but permeates it; philosophical anthropology and
sociology are related but the former is much more indebt and profound than the later. He
avers that, in fact, ethno-philosophy begins its study where the anthropologist ends. This
understanding was clearly stated by Temples in his Bantu Philosophy, where he wrote that;
We need not expect the first African who comes along, especially the young one, to
be able to give us a systematic exposition of his ontological system.
Nonetheless, this ontology exists; and it penetrates and informs all the thought
of these primitives; it dominates and orientates all their behavior. It is our task
to trace out the elements of this thought, to classify them and to sytematise
them according to the ordered systems and the intellectual disciplines of the
word world (Okafor :364).

Okafor, thus outlined the essential characteristics of ethno-philosophy into the following: a. It
is a philosophy of “folknness predicaded on the existence of a communal mind. b. There is an
absence of abstract logic because it is devoid of the kind of universal ideas characteristics of
western philosophy
c.It is a philosophy of anonymity: it is not of a particular individual, rather of a
“commonwealth”; the individual philosopher only interprets and unveils the philosophy. These
considered elements in ethno-philosophy are in contrast with the key character of western
philosophy, which is logical and individualistic. While the African disposition is emotional, the
westerner is logical; the African is communalistic, the westerner is individualistic; western
philosophy is scientific, African philosophy is ethno-philosophical and “pre or non-scientific”
(Deacon :98). In ethno-philosophy African philosophy is thus defines as;
…the reverse of the thought that comes as the outcome of theoretically and deductively
reached inference. African philosophy is an existential experience common and
obvious to all members of the stock. Basic logical principles in the West such as the
principle of contradiction and of excluded middle have known no room in African
thought. The basic principle is that of a poetic self-involvement that defies any
Western logical formation (H. Oruka :120-1).

Critics of ethno-philosophy stigmatize it as a philosophy of that rests lazily on the authority of
tradition, which in itself does not conform to the strict generally acceptable standards of the
philosophical enterprise of being scientific and be identifiable with an individual. They argue
that the ethno-philosophers merely describe a worldview or thought pattern of a particular
African people and extend this to the whole of Africa. For them, philosophy cannot be
dependent on mere racial axioms but must be according to rational, critical, rigorous, logical
and reflective investigations. They assert that if African and Western philosophies must differ,
the difference can only be on cultural, historical, and environmental inclinations but not in the
interpretation or character of the discipline (Deacon :98). This much is stated in the
arguments of Oruka, who notes that in every culture, there are both the critical and uncritical elements. Europe is not exempted in this analysis. The uncritical elements in the African world for him can be found in religions, legends, folk tales, myths, customs, superstitions, etc. Philosophy, he adds cannot be found in the uncritical, emotive and non-logical aspect of society. Therefore, ethnophilosophy, based on these cannot be regarded as philosophy in the strict sense, rather in the debased inference (Oruka :120-21).

The school of thought, which opposed the conception of African philosophy from the post Temple's ethno-philosophical perspective, was the professional school. Prominent members of this school are Henry Odera Oruka, Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin J. Hountonji and Peter O. Bodurin. They share the view that African philosophy in the tradition of ethnophilosophy is not philosophy in the strict sense, but merely in a debased sense of the word. For them, philosophy is a universal enterprise and cannot be delimited into cultural boundaries. Its meaning and content should therefore not be independent on racial or cultural boundaries and specialisations. Furthermore, it employs the methods of critical, reflective, and logical enquiry. African philosophy on this note for them, should not be an exception to these categorisations of philosophy, but a corpus of thoughts arising from the discussion appropriation of authentic philosophical ideas by Africans or in the Africa context; its genuine contributions in terms of the African past, current or potential in philosophy (Oruka :120). They argue further that:

African philosophy is the philosophy done by African philosophers whether it be in the area of logic, metaphysics, ethics history of philosophy. Thus, if African philosophers were to engage in debates on Plato's epistemology, or theoretical identities, their work would qualify as African philosophy (Serequeberhan).

It is in response to this omnibus categorization of African philosophy in view of the professional school, which sees African philosophy as a mere modification or even a copy of Western philosophy, that resulted in the school of thought known as philosophic sagacity or sage philosophy. Our quest in the next analysis is therefore to explain briefly the nature of sage philosophy.

**Philosophic Sagacity**

Philosophic sagacity or sage philosophy according to Odera Oruka;

…Consists of the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and exploring the world which fluctuates between popular wisdom (well known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths) and didactic wisdom (an expounded wisdom and a rational thought of some given individuals within a community). While popular wisdom is often conformist, didactic wisdom is at times critical of the communal set-up and popular wisdom See (Oladipo: 83).

It is the recognition of and analysis of ideas of Africans who, although uninfluenced by Western education, are capable of fundamental reflection on man, society and nature (Oladipo :83). Sage philosophy views philosophy as a product of an individual's critical reflection and identifies the sage as a thinker in the African community versed in the belief and folk wisdom of his people. As a thinker, he has subjected these beliefs and wisdom to rational scrutiny thereby either exposing their internal contradictions, for which they must be rejected, or showing their internal consistencies, for which he recommends them to be accepted (Okafor :251).

Philosophic sagacity consists mainly of two categories of people who influence the product of reasoning to be so referred to as African philosophy. These include the sages, regarded as experts in didactic wisdom who do not merely recite the folk philosophies of their
communities, but are capable of subjecting these ideas to criticism and modification. They have the capacity to support their views or ideas with reasons or arguments and are capable of conceiving and recommending alternatives to communally accepted opinions and prejudices. A sage strictly speaking for Odera is A person …in a philosophical sense only to the extent that he is consistently concerned with the fundamental ethical and empirical issues and questions relevant to the society and his ability to offer insightful solutions to some of these issues (Oladipo 83). On the other hand are the interlocutors who are professionally trained in the art of philosophy and can apply the tools of philosophy to elicit natural ideas from the sages. The professional philosopher initiates the questions and mode of discussion and carefully midwives to explicate or give birth to otherwise implicit ideas. The meaning is that the sage is not engaged in “a deliberate intellectual pursuit of explanation and understanding”, but a respondent to questions, which may have been predetermined by the philosopher (Oladipo). The basic conception of philosophic sagacity consists of the organized method of eliciting inborn wisdom from hitherto non-literate wise ones in traditional African societies by trained philosophers, who understands that value and place of traditional wisdom in the body of ideas; and how these traditional ideas can form the basis of discourse in African philosophy. In it, both the sage and the trained philosopher are coefficient of the achieved ideas.

Critics of the sage philosophy argue that philosophical sagacity fell into the very pit it aimed to cover. The process of extraction of ideas from the sages and the translation of these into philosophical forms involve an active participation of the trained philosopher and all those who were involved in the process. In the final analysis, it is no longer a oneperson activity and as such, the individuality of the philosophy becomes questionable. This leads us to the question: what is the difference between sage philosophy and ethno-philosophy? This shall be our analysis in the next paragraphs.

Sage Philosophy and Ethno-philosophy, What Difference?
As shown in our treatise above, it is discernable that the subject of African philosophy has elicited an active debate in African consciousness. Ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy, professional philosophy and national ideological philosophy are products of this active debate. They are responses to the questions relating to the nature, method and content of this now found, radical philosophical engagement in the African domain.

The most prominent and that which has received the most critical comments has been ethno-philosophy. It was in an attempt to satisfy critics of ethno-philosophy as folk and philosophy only in the debased sense that responses were made to consciously redirect the universalization of African philosophy to qualify it as a science, that made for the professional school, which is rife with its own criticisms, such as referring to African philosophy as a mere modification or even a copy of Western philosophy. Sage philosophy was therefore an evolution to settle the de-Africanisation of African philosophy and also to remove the group appellation on this philosophy. On a critical analysis, ethno-philosophy earlier discussed as a reflection on the folk wisdom and philosophy of a people in terms of the customs, traditions, and religious beliefs of a specific people in Africa, premised on the assumption that there is a metaphysical and ideological system embodied in the traditional wisdom and the institutions of the various African people is criticized mainly on the grounds that its emphasis is on group beliefs, knowledge and articulations. Can we have group conceptions or thoughts? Can we base philosophical ideas on collective conceptions? Considering the fact that we have different groups in Africa, is it then be possible for us to have an aggregation of such diverse group ideas wish can be called African philosophy? It then means that we can only have a plurality of philosophies (Okafor :251) in Africa, meaning that we can therefore have African philosophies. Sage philosophy therefore was reasoned to be the critical response to ethno-philosophy.
Conclusion
In the final analysis, it is plausible to contend that ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy are not radically different. The attempt at making African philosophy as being the product of a thought process of an individual (as in "Plato's philosophy", Aristotle's philosophy" etc), held by the so-called universalists, did not succeed in the sage-professional philosopher attempt. This difficulty encountered on the propriety of the product of the encounter between the sage and trained philosopher only buttresses the richness and uniqueness of the African world experience, which is embedded in the 'people's collective experience'. The African has always had a lived experience, which does not emphasis individuality, and this permeates his complete existence as captured in Mbiti's, "I am, because we are; and since we are; therefore I am" (Mbiti :108-9). It is my contention that since philosophy is a critical attempt at seeking an understanding of reality, the African unique experience can rather be another approach to this general quest for knowledge. A careful survey of the short but yet active and critical history of African philosophy and the attempt to give it a clear understanding has in my conception, been an attempt largely at the study of the beliefs, myths, customs, language, lived experience and the general worldview of the African people. The debate has only been on how to make these traditional African components critical and philosophic. The usefulness of the African world and her experiences cannot be wished away in an attempt to universalize philosophy. In ethno-philosophy or sage philosophy, (I argue that sage philosophy is merely and element of ethno-philosophy), the uncritical elements in traditional African experience can be made critical by the conscious effort of the now conscious African academic.

Works Cited