

REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE AND INTRODUCTION TO ARTICLES IN THIS VOLUME

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This intercontinental conference brought together over thirty presenters from East, West, and South Africa, Europe, and the United States. The conference was one in a series of six conferences sponsored by the International Society of African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS), an organization headed in 2000 by its President, Prof. Olufemi Taiwo, then of Loyola University, Chicago, and now at Seattle University. (The current President is Prof. Nkiru Nzegwu of Binghamton University). ISAPS has had former conferences at University of West Indies, Jamaica; University of the North, South Africa; as well as Townson State Binghamton University and Loyola University in USA. The 2001 conference was held at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, and the 2002 conference plans to be held at College of Wooster, Ohio, USA. The Society has made an effort to ensure that its conference venues are geographically varied enough to draw together a wide variety of scholars interested in issues related to African philosophy. In fact, Prof. Taiwo explained that only by having a conference venue in East Africa would scholars from other areas gain exposure to the vast array of insights and ideas presented by so many East African scholars. Of course, the sharing of ideas is mutual and in many directions.

The conference was put together by a local team from University of Nairobi, including Dr. F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, Oriare Nyarwath, and Gail Presbey (who was visiting University of Nairobi for two years as a Fulbright Senior Scholar). The local Nairobi team chose "Thought and Practice in African Philosophy" as the theme. Some may remember that the theme "Thought and Practice" used to be the title of a journal published by the University of Nairobi Department of Philosophy. While the journal unfortunately ceased publication, the philosophical ideas continued. This conference gave a venue to the more recent philosophical ponderings of the East African philosophers. The title also reflected the convictions of the organizing committee that philosophy should be relevant to people's lives, and not merely abstract reflections unrelated to daily life. Paper proposals from around the world were scrutinized, and the local logistics were set up to everyone's satisfaction. A camaraderie developed during the days of the conference, over paper sessions, teas, and evening meals, culminating in a night of dancing at "Motherland," a local Ethiopian restaurant and open-air music venue. The conference therefore had a healthy balance of serious scholarship and relaxing fun, as new friendships and collaborations were forged. The success of the conference was due also in large part to the support of Konrad Adenauer Foundation, who underwrote the cost of the Eastern African participants, enabling large numbers of them to be present (making up about half of the total program).

I. INTRODUCTIONS

The program began with a series of welcomes and speeches from Vice Chancellor Prof. Francis Gichaga, Principal of Arts and Sciences Prof. F. Kibera, ISAPS President Prof. Olufemi Taiwo, and Mr. Otieno Aluoka, the Programme Officer of Konrad Adenauer Foundation, many of whom noted the importance of hosting such a conference, and the importance of the mission of a society such as ISAPS. Dr. Solomon Monyenye, current Departmental Chair, and Professor J. Nyasani, both from the Philosophy Department at University of Nairobi, discussed the importance of teaching and studying of philosophy at African universities. The papers as presented in this volume roughly approximate, but slightly deviate, from their order of presentation at the conference. Of the 36 papers on the program, 25 were selected and have made it into this published volume, so some presenters had to be consolidated and regrouped under new topics (that more closely approximated their paper themes) in this volume.

II. AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The first day's papers revolved around the topic of the importance of developing African philosophy as a discipline, and its relationship to other areas of study.

Prof. G.E.M. Ogotu of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya, presented his paper, "African Renaissance: A Third Millennium Challenge to the Thought and Practice of African Philosophy." He began by reflecting on the successes of the earlier European Renaissance, a time of great renewal and recovery. He then asserted that Africa needed a Renaissance, since it needs to create a self-image of accomplishment and well being. To do this, Africa must revisit its accomplishments in history. While the European renaissance could rely upon scholars and books, Africa must rely on its oral traditions, as well as archaeological discoveries. Ogotu reminded conference attendees that Africa is the birthplace of humanity. Africa was host to unparalleled human prosperity during the Stone Age. It was the place where use of fire, hunting, discovery of edible fruits and plants began. During the Late Stone Age and Bronze Age, Africans became concerned for the souls of animals they hunted, and then concerned for their own souls as well, giving rise to religion. Ogotu then spoke of the Iron Age, and the philosopher and sage, Sin Akuru Kuku Lubanga, who lived near Lake Turkana in place then called Dog Nam, around 2438 BCE. He was so well known for his wisdom, that Emperor Urnamu of Ur in Mesopotamia sent emissaries to consult him on matters of Ethics, Metaphysics, Astronomy, human origins, security, survival and destiny. Such wakeful, coherent, mental reflection was the basis for philosophy. Prof. Ogotu certainly impressed the audience with his account of this early philosopher. He ended his presentation with a call for African universities to adapt their subject matter to their unique situation on the African continent.

Prof. Jeffrey Crawford, philosophy professor and Dean at Central State University, Ohio USA, delivered a paper entitled "Africana Philosophy, Civilization of the Universal, and the Giving of Gifts," exploring the ideas of W.E.B. DuBois and L. Senghor, as well as the contemporary reflections of Lucius Outlaw. Outlaw suggested that "Africana Philosophy" serve as a gathering term to unite together the works of Africans, African-Americans, and non-Africans interested in African ideas ("Africanists"). Crawford sees

it as part of a concern for “contributionism,” which tries to discern who should get credit for what. This contributionist movement argues that general human progress takes place through cultural exchanges, and that our world could overcome its ideological racism by recognizing the extent and importance of these exchanges. It was DuBois who had insisted that each world culture had a distinctive gift to give humanity; therefore each race should give its own contribution to the general cause. Senghor pointed ahead to the synthesis of African and European ideas to create a universalism. The “Civilization of the Universal,” as Senghor called it, had as its goal “tilting the long arc of the world toward justice.” Crawford found the ideas of all three thinkers related and mutually helpful. But, he does caution that the problems of the “color line” continue despite contributionism’s successes because of entrenched self-interest among white international capitalists, who indulge in self-serving denial.

Mr. Kai Kresse, teaching and pursuing his Ph.D. at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, U.K., presented “Towards an anthropology of philosophy: Four Turns, with reference to the African context.” He explained that anthropology and philosophy could now be seen as partners in researches into African philosophy, having overcome some of the earlier inaccurate, insensitive and paternalistic anthropological reporting. He cites Hountondji’s forward to his famous book’s second edition as evidence that anthropology is changing. He notes that the heated debate between ethnophilosophy and its critics has sobered down. No longer is there an “either-or”: more authors, like Odera Oruka, are positing a third alternative that avoids the pitfalls of both extreme positions. Kresse argues that philosophy can be found in any culture. Here, he refers to two different aspects of philosophy. One is the innovative and reflexive thinking, wisdom of interest to everyone. The second is institutional, conservative, scholarly, historical, and doctrinal, done by the trained thinker. However, these two levels are often in interaction. When a philosopher is doing field work, or when an anthropologist is paying attention to the development of philosophical ideas, he or she will have to ask whether what they are listening to is historical knowledge or genuinely innovative? Is it critical or doctrinal? Kresse also admires anthropologists who have become sensitive to the possible errors they might make, such as mis-stated, understated or unstatable knowledge; misunderstandings, simplifications, and distortions. Kresse points to Cassirer’s idea of philosophy as the critique and fulfillment of the symbolic forms (myth, religion, science, and art). Philosophy is not a separate form of knowledge. It also means that there does not have to be one universal philosophy for all persons and cultures. Philosophies will be different from each other since they have starting points with different symbols. While traditions are distinct, they are still comparable. Kresse argues that religious thinkers and experts are a good source for discovering philosophy. By studying such persons, and creating texts of indigenous philosophical discourse which can then be further interpreted and discussed, insight as to how individuals shape culture and society, and a clearer idea of any society’s internal intellectual dynamics, can be better understood.

Mr. Workineh Kelbessa of the Philosophy Department, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Philosophy at University of Cardiff in Wales, U.K. In his paper “Indigenous and Modern Environmental Ethics: Toward Partnership,” he addressed the need for African philosophy to be concerned with issues of environmental ethics. He also noted that contemporary Western environmental ethicists seemed to

know little about African indigenous or traditional ideas regarding the environment, and he thought the two groups could benefit from mutual exchange of ideas. Recent environmentalists have turned to Eastern religions as well as native American and Australian aboriginal societies in search of communities which have a positive environmental ethic. Other commentators have stressed, however, that there is usually little relation between environmentally-sensitive beliefs and environmentally destructive practice. Most ignore Africa, or in the case of Baird Callicott, consider Africans as humanists without much sensitivity to non-human nature. Workineh then presents the case of the Oromo ethnic group in Ethiopia as an African traditional community that has always respected non-human nature. The Oromo have always preserved certain kinds of trees, animals and water sources for religious reasons. They consider *Waaqa* (God) the guardian of all things, so no one is free to destroy natural things. The tradition emphasized "*Saffuu*" which is an attitude of distance and respect between all things, suggesting that in the social order, each thing should keep its place, and respect both rights and duties. Workineh however realizes that not all practices of peasants are environmentally friendly. Peasants should be encouraged to implement serious changes to help the environment. He states that in many developing countries, the problem is not lack of environmental consciousness. Rather, people are not in a position to protect the environment due to survival issues. The solution is a re-emphasis of the mutual reinforcement of indigenous and contemporary environmental ethics approaches.

Emeritus Professor Heinrich Beck of the Philosophy Department at Otto Friedrich University, Bamberg, Germany, came accompanied by the Vice Chancellor of his University, Prof. Hierold. Prof. Beck gave the Keynote address, comparing European, Asian, and African philosophical traditions. Beck insisted that the world needs peace, but that peace can't be based on intellectual and ideological monism. Neither can it be based on a pluralism of unrelated intellectual attitudes and ideas. Rather, like a melody, it has to weave together different philosophical traditions to create a wholeness of a social organism. The similarities and differences of world cultures offer the possibilities of mutual stimulation and completion. He proceeded to compare the ideas of the three continents regarding their ideas of knowledge, medicine, nature and spirituality. While painting the ideas of these three cultures with a broad brush, he acknowledged that many current philosophical movements such as postmodernism would accentuate differences and emphasize the particularism and radical contextualism of ideas, therefore criticizing his own attempts to generalize in describing "Asian philosophy" for example. His response to such criticisms is to reassert the need to find the similarities, the common themes that unify the thought of Europe, Africa and Asia respectively, while not denying the particular disagreements. The solution will then be a multi-unity in creative tension with its various internal critics.

Professor Jay van Hook of the Philosophy Department University of Central Florida, USA, as well as Emeritus professor at Northwestern College, Iowa, USA, presented his paper, "The Universalist Thesis Revisited: What Direction for African Philosophy in the New Millennium?" He argues that the debate between universalism and particularism in African philosophy has outlived its usefulness. But before the debate goes, van Hook wants to point out some lessons to be learned. Particularists hold the position that philosophical ideas, content, method, or activity are historically and culturally specific, and should not be applied universally. In contrast, universalism argues that philosophy's

meaning should be the same in all cultures. Van Hook looks at Gyekye's recent book, *Tradition and Modernity*, where Gyekye tries to find a middle ground between the two extremes. He later looks at Wiredu's book, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, where he contends that Wiredu argues for a moderate cultural universalism. Both Gyekye and Wiredu want to ensure the possibility of cultural borrowing, which van Hook sees as valuable. But he thinks Wiredu goes too far when he wants to ground the possibility of cultural borrowing on philosophy's attainment of "truth," an aspiration van Hook sees as impossible and dangerous. Rather, van Hook proposes a Wittgensteinian argument that philosophies are expressions of particular cultures but have enough family resemblances between them to permit cultural borrowing and cross-cultural comparison. While particularism served an important purpose earlier in the history of African philosophy, now both universalism and particularism should be jettisoned in favor of a healthy pluralism focused on the existential situations in which Africans find themselves.

Participants addressing the topics above showed a common concern for bringing topics in African philosophy from the margins of academic philosophy's consciousness to its center. Africa's contributions to philosophy, history, and environment were highlighted, while the questions of methodology (how to go about doing African philosophy) and the goal of African philosophy were presented from a variety of points of view. Some emphasized field work (Kelbessa, Kresse); some dealt in broad generalizations (Beck); some brought in the importance of history (Ogotu); some emphasized the need for cultural borrowing (Crawford, Beck, van Hook).

III. AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE PROBLEM OF MISSIONARIES AND COLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Several presenters emphasized the harm that foreign missionaries and colonialists had done to African self-understanding and values. Some expressed concern that foreigners (especially white Europeans and Americans) would always misunderstand Africa (Owakah, Hecht); others seemed more hopeful that they could learn from mistakes and correct the tendency to think in (neo-) colonial fashion (Shea, Duvenage). Some saw Euro-American contributions to African philosophy and politics as almost wholly negative (Owakah, Shea); others saw it as a mix of benefits and curse (Duvenage, Hecht).

Mr. Joseph Situma of the Philosophy Department, University of Nairobi, Kenya, wrote about Bakhtin and Mudimbe's contribution to the topic of African self-identity. Drawing upon Kuhn's idea of a paradigm shift, he notes that there is a relationship between a paradigm and the existing socio-cultural situation. A prevailing paradigm will stifle ideas that are in contrast to its own discourse. Situma scrutinizes the former colonial ("Occidental") paradigm and asks that it now be replaced with a paradigm where Africans can explore their self-identity without being forced to fit a mold made by Europeans. The paper explores the relationship between self and other between Africans and Europeans. In colonial times, the self-other relationship seemed to be motivated by love but was actually filled with treachery. Exploring Bakhtin's metaphor of the self-other relationship based on the hero-author relationship, he explores the idea of the "authoring Other." The Occidental paradigm helped Europeans conquer Africa and gave them the courage to impose their values. But this subjugation is now being

challenged by African authors, who want to challenge the Occidental paradigm and regain authorial power for themselves. The European reaction has accused African authors of putting up walls and rejecting the “benign” universalism they have brought. Situma concludes by hailing the important work that African authors are doing in actively shifting the center away from a spiritually bankrupt Occidental paradigm.

Prof. Pieter Duvenage of Rand Afrikaans University, South Africa, presented a paper, “Is there a South African Philosophical Tradition?” The paper surveyed the history of philosophy in South Africa, from the beginning of colonial times to the present. He suggests that philosophy in South Africa is due in a large part to its connection to the First World as a postcolonial periphery. Local indigenous cultures were uprooted and displaced. Tertiary education was started by the British in the 19th century; philosophy then found its power base in the universities. At the time, British philosophy was influenced by Hegelian idealism, which interpreted in a certain way, ended up as a legitimization for colonialism, with its idea of history as a bloody narrative of progress leading up to the “highest good.” However back in Britain, British Idealism was challenged and replaced by analytic philosophy, so the same began to happen in South Africa. Other reactions against British Idealism came from Afrikaners, due to the continental philosophy influence on the theology of the Dutch Reformed Church. They emphasized religious experience in contrast to an overly scientific world view. Through this time there were very few Black South Africans in academic philosophy. There was the Black Consciousness movement, but it had remained outside of the academy. Due to this situation, Duvenage argues that: 1) there’s a need to do a genealogy of South African philosophy, exploring its role of being on the post-colonial periphery; 2) philosophy needs to gain its relevance to South African conditions and locality; and 3) he urges caution regarding functionalism, which he sees as due to the pressure of technology. Instead, philosophers must be concerned about culture.

Mr. Francis Owakah of the Philosophy Department, University of Nairobi, Kenya, began his paper by proposing to address three key problems in African philosophy: imperialism’s legacy in the study of African philosophy, the question of the audience of African philosophy, and the debate over African culture. He began with a definition, describing African Philosophy as “second order discourse that critically analyses the elements of African culture within the framework of the method, style and language generally accepted as philosophical.” The definition emphasizes a universal method of philosophy applied to a specific topic, African culture. Owakah revisited Tempels and made allusions to other missionaries, suggesting that they were paradigmatic of what happens when foreigners try to do African philosophy. The missionary influence on the field of African philosophy was later replaced by anthropology. He is ambivalent as to whether this development is an improvement or not. He holds onto Odera Oruka’s phrase of “anthropological fogs” to describe anyone who wants to use anthropological data or approach, suggesting that they had therefore lost their way. While anthropology restricts itself to the unchanging aspects of a culture, philosophy studies the dynamic aspects. He also argues that philosophers must “transcend” the “raw data” of anthropology. He praises his colleague F. Ochieng’-Odhiambo, who in further research into sage philosophy, has called his own method “philosophic sagacity,” suggesting that the earlier emphasis in sage philosophy was too anthropological, and his own method emphasizes “didactic thinking” more purely philosophical and further removed from anthropology. Owakah

also agreed with Ochieng'-Odhiambo that Africans should be cautious about Westerners engaging in philosophic sagacity, due to their propensity to misunderstand African culture. "Perhaps such researchers should specialize in anthropology of African philosophy, but not claim to be doing African philosophy *per se*." While relegating them to anthropology, Owakah also cast doubt on their usefulness even there. Owakah is also concerned that some famous African philosophers such as Kwasi Wiredu have denigrated African cultures by suggesting they have little to offer modern life. He concludes by encouraging African philosophy to break out of a "closed system" structure, abandon claims to absolute truth, and engage in the open-ended exercise of asking questions.

Dr. Elisabeth-Dorothea Hecht, is originally from Germany, but has lived in Kenya many years and works for DAAD (the German Academic Exchange Service) in Nairobi, Kenya. Her paper combines her academic interests with her daily observations of living in Kenya. Her paper, "The Impact of Non-African Religions, Philosophies, and Systems of Thought on African Life, and on the Interpretations of African Philosophies," is concerned about the impact that the religions of Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam have on African religion, philosophy, and moral values. Hecht is concerned that the deep and helpful insights of these foreign religions do not take root. Instead, the worst aspects of materialism and egoism spread. Hypocrisy reigns, as politicians gain praise for their large donations during church services, without exposing the corrupt dealings that amassed the fortune in the first place. Hecht notes that many Kenyans are trained in Western philosophy, which in itself is a good thing, because it emphasizes critical reflection in search of the truth. However, these same Western-trained African philosophers have been analyzing African religions, and when they do so, they distort it because of their western training. While she appreciates the research of Eno Beuchelt in the field of African psychology, she is concerned about its accuracy, because Westerners have their own subjective values. Hecht is concerned that many Africans live by a value which insists that "we must help our family, those close to us," but is heartened to find recent Kenyan novelists who portray characters who go beyond narrow concerns to embrace the humanity of the poorest of the poor.

Shannon Shea, teaching and pursuing her Ph.D. in philosophy at Loyola University, Chicago, USA, in her paper, "The Role of Imperialism in Rwanda: Is Colonialism Dead?," answers the question in the negative. While the Rwandan genocide of 1994 is usually considered the result of "ages-old tribal warfare," Shea finds out that it was colonial powers who reified and reinforced ethnic tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis. While Hutus and Tutsis have been fighting for decades, the causes of the tensions have changed, and need historical analysis. She explains that it is the love of hierarchal categorization which undergirded European racist ideologies which were then used to set Hutu and Tutsi against each other and below whites. For example, John Hanning Speke of England argued a hundred years ago that the Tutsi were racially superior to the Hutu, and these beliefs were internalized by Tutsis even to this day. The ideas of race, culture, and history were melded, encouraging both parties of the conflict to see their disagreements as impossible to overcome. Colonialist ideology presumes that values of African communities, whether social, economic, legal or cultural, are inferior and should be replaced or ignored. Devaluing of African culture and Africans themselves led to reluctance to intervene to stop the genocide. This (racist) attitude of apathy continues

to this day, as Shea notes that both Core and Bush in the recent U.S. election campaign agreed that the U.S. made the right decision by not intervening to stop the Rwandan genocide, while they defend interventions in parts of the world other than Africa.

The topics of these papers were quite interesting to the conference audience. Especially Mr. Owakah's paper, coming at the end of the first day of the conference, a day that was filled with so many papers presented by Westerners involved in African Philosophy, precipitated a storm of debate. The first from the audience to comment was ISAPS President Femi Taiwo, who saw such restrictions on the membership of philosophers doing African philosophy to be counter-productive. After all, Taiwo stated, when he writes a paper on Kant, he does not want people dismissing him because he is not German. People should be judged by the merits of their works, and not pre-judged because of their race or ethnicity. Kresse also pointed out that Owakah's views were based on outdated notions of anthropology, and that even Hountondji has admitted in the second edition of his famous book that anthropology had been trying its best to reject its old static approach to study cultures in transition. Pamela Abuya argued that philosophy must be seen in objective terms as a universal human enterprise, rather than narrowing it down to African and Western. Research, she argued, is not a confine of any particular continent.

While F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo spoke from the audience defending his new, specific approach to "philosophic sagacity," others such as Chaungo Barasa praised those who were taking sage philosophy into new interdisciplinary areas it had not ventured before, such as conflict resolution. It can also be questioned as to whether Owakah's charges against Oruka's "flawed" sage philosophy method accurately portray the project. From the beginning, Oruka himself spoke of philosophic sagacity, and emphasized the didactic and individualized thoughts of philosophic sages interviewed. Mr. Owakah, however, bravely held his ground, and complained about the extent to which the audience was disagreeing with his views. Hopefully Mr. Owakah will feel heartened by the fact that other white academics were owning up to the shortcomings of the colonial legacy and Western influence, and looking for a way to proceed without repeating past mistakes.

IV. GENDER AND CULTURE IN AFRICA

Two of our presenters directly addressed the issue of women's role in African societies as well as in the field of feminist and/or womanist philosophy. A third looked at rites of initiation for boys and girls of the Abaguusi community, delving into its deeper significance, and asking about its continued relevance in a changing society.

Ms. Helen Oduk of the Philosophy Department, Kenyatta University, Kenya, gave a paper on "Feminist Philosophy: an African perspective." She charges Western Feminist Philosophy with being ignorant and negligent of African women's experiences. She draws on the work of Mirza who discusses Black British Feminism, considering it a model for her own project in African feminism. Cataloguing the position and experience of "most" African women, she mentions collecting firewood and water, caring for young children, men, the sick and elderly, and farming using mostly manual labor. She notes that women heading households tend to feed and educate their sons first and daughters second, starting a vicious circle where girls start out disadvantaged and repeat the

cycle when they become mothers. Once circumcised and married they rarely return to school, leaving little opportunity for self-reflection and generation of knowledge. She considered, however, that feminist consciousness could develop, starting from the awareness of a wrong, and going on to the development of a sense of sisterhood. This personal awareness could become political when women realize that they suffer, and therefore must look for solutions, together. She concludes suggesting that Western philosophy should open up to African feminist approaches; and she insists that government(s) and NGOs should implement programs that will take the issues beyond academia to affect social consciousness.

Professor Claude Sumner of the Philosophy Department at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, gave a paper, “The Status of Woman in Ethiopian Sapiential and Philosophical Literature: the ‘phenomenon’ and its Critique,” which responded to an earlier article by Gail Presbey, critiquing his work on Ethiopian philosophy from a feminist perspective. While agreeing with the critic that an early philosophical work, *The Life and Maxims of Skendes* was misogynist, he argued that by looking at the full spectrum of Ethiopian philosophy, one could see high points and low points in estimations of women’s worth and character within Ethiopian texts. The good news was that not all of Ethiopian writings were as negative towards women as the one focused on in Presbey’s paper. He distributed a chart on which he had the various works in his series of Ethiopian Philosophy rated for their friendliness towards women’s issues. Looking first at the oral tradition, while proverbs and folk-tales had negative treatment of women, songs (particularly love songs) praised women. In written texts, the work of Zera Yacob championed the worth of women. Sumner argues that there is something in the character of oral literature that emphasizes tradition. One cannot just assert, as some of his energetic students do, that they will compose better proverbs about women, since a proverb depends upon its being repeated throughout time. In contrast, written texts are a place where one lone voice, such as Zera Yacob’s treatise, can make their point and endure through time to challenge the views of others. Sumner concludes by arguing that those who are interested in challenging the prevailing negative views and practices regarding women should not overlook the resources that can be found in part of the Ethiopian tradition – especially the written works of Zera Yacob – in order to challenge the prevailing milieu.

Dr. Solomon Monyenye, Chair of the Department of Philosophy, University of Nairobi, Kenya, described the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood for members of the Abagusii community. He notes that such rituals, involving the pain of circumcision and the drawing of blood, are now quite controversial, and many call for their end. But abandoning initiation rites has led to widespread social malaise, as the current educational institutions cannot currently provide the benefits of the former practices. Monyenye therefore delves into the deeper meanings of the ritual. The ritual emphasizes the break between the former life of childhood and the upcoming life of the adult. The pain is concentrated in genitals because they are the site of the giving of life, and so they must die to be reborn in adult fashion. He notes the contrast between the status of young men and women after their circumcision. While young men are awarded new prestige and considered to be responsible, young women are still sheltered and relegated to minor duties. Monyenye argues that the best aspects of the ritual should be transformed and applied to formal education, which can then initiate young men and women into the contemporary world, giving them both the confidence that comes from knowledge.

The topics generated a lot of audience participation. Much debate surrounded Helen Oduk's claim, during the question and answer session, that only women could be feminists because only they could understand women from first-hand experience. This frustrated a group of progressive Kenyan male students in attendance who also wanted to be feminists. They drew parallels to the preceding day's debate about whites' ability to do African philosophy, insisting that a man sensitive to feminist issues could practice feminism. Questions directed at Prof. Sumner focused on the extreme ups and downs of his chart tracing feminism in the works of Ethiopian philosophy. Why, some wondered, could there be such extreme variations in the extent of feminist consciousness over time? Sumner's only response was that his chart was based on existing written documents.

Pamela Abuya had a number of questions on Helen Oduk's paper. Her concerns revolved around the distinctions made between African and Western feminisms, and whether these distinctions are harmonious or can be harmonized, and finally, whether these differences are significant. The presenter responded broadly by explaining that indeed there are significant underlying differences between African and Western feminisms, and that these should be acknowledged and appreciated. Abuya suggested that perhaps the differences subsist largely because of different environmental, geographical, cultural, social, political, and economic contexts.

V. SAGE PHILOSOPHY

Conference participants, and especially the hosts at University of Nairobi, were happy to see that their dear departed colleague and Professor, H. Odera Oruka, continued to influence younger African philosophers to follow in his footsteps by further developing his project of sage philosophy. Those addressing the topic come from Kenya, other parts of Africa (Ethiopia) and the diaspora (California, USA).

Dr. Bekele Gutema of the Philosophy Department Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, wrote a paper on "The Role of Sagacity in Resolving Conflicts Peacefully" which emphasizes the continuing importance of Odera Oruka's sage philosophy project. Sage philosophy appreciates the indigenous knowledge of African thinkers, but emphasizes that traditional ideas should be subject to scrutiny to discern their suitability for today's problems. With Africa filled with conflicts, rather than look to sometimes inappropriate solutions from Western models, we would do well to look to sages for remedies.

Mr. Chaungo, Barasa, presently head of the Water and Environmental Sanitation department of CARE International of Kenya in Dadaab refugee camp, had worked closely with Odera Oruka on the sage philosophy project during his student days and after. In his paper, Barasa first notes that "Thought and Practice," the theme of the conference, is also the title of a philosophy journal that was published by the University of Nairobi in the 70s and 80s, under the editorship of Odera Oruka. And it was Oruka who had stated that Africa needed a cultural cure to its problems. Barasa agrees, stating that Kenyan families need cultural sanity and equilibrium to ensure Cultural Family Livelihood Security. He gets the idea from the NGO community where he works, however in that context survival issues like food security take center stage. By emphasizing culture, he shows that cultural practices need to be connected to consistent thoughts

and belief systems. He suggests Kenyans must re-examine their lives and cultures in five areas: the intersection/ harmonization of tradition and modernity; death and burial ceremonies; marriage and inheritance; inter-family and clan relations, and leadership and role-modeling. All of this can be attained with the help of sage philosophy, which encourages people to pursue wisdom and reflect on their beliefs. The family teaches moral behavior; however, in Kenya's modern families (making up about 35% of the population), there is a lack of morality. "Modern" Kenyans hold a flawed concept of modernity, equating it with European culture and religion, and their understanding of that culture is rudimentary and incoherent. The modern Kenyan also has a stunted understanding of indigenous cultures and traditions; in its place is materialism, and consumerism, and status. They barely mask their distaste for rural folk and environment; yet they engage in gender oppression which is contradicting modernity. Also, modern Kenyans are easily manipulated and bought by various politicians. Such a description shows that philosophical reflection upon tradition is mandatory in order for society to become productive and coherent.

Dr. Charles E. Moore is a professional musician, an ethno-musicologist, and recently received his Ph.D. from University of California, Los Angeles, USA. He is a founding member of the band "Eternal Wind", and has collaborated with scholar - musician Yusef Lateef and others in many international music performances. In his paper, "Philosophic Sagacity in the Blues Music of W.C. Handy," Moore applies Odera Oruka's focus on the philosophical wisdom to be found in Africa, and argues that wisdom can also be expressed in music, through word and sound. He then explained the "African Music Continuum," which follows the influence of African music around the globe throughout the African diaspora. One particularly significant contribution to wisdom is the blues music of W.C. Handy, known as the Father of the Blues. Moore analyzes Handy's song, "Memphis Blues (Mr. Crump)," drawing on the works of Alain Locke as well as African-centered philosophies of ancient Egypt to analyze the wisdom contained within the song. Moore argues that much of the music that is part of the African Music Continuum is misunderstood by those who enjoy listening to it, but do not notice its philosophical message. In doing so, African music becomes a commodity in a global marketplace instead of an enlightening experience. Moore pleased conference attendees when he pulled out his trumpet and gave a musical rendition of Handy's most famous songs, an apt illustration of his paper's argument.

Peter Ogola Onyango, a philosophy student from Moi University, Kenya, presented his paper, "A Continued Study on Sage Philosophy: Emphasis on Jaramogi Oginga Odinga." Reviewing Odera Oruka's criteria for considering someone a sage, Onyango concludes that Oginga Odinga, former Vice President of Kenya and Luo 'Ker' (cultural and spiritual leader) meets the criteria. Noting the sagacity involved in Odinga's criticizing the Umira Kager clan (who had sided against S.M. Otieno's widow in the controversial burial case), Onyango shows that Odinga is someone who is not only familiar with the traditional wisdom of his community, but also involved in critically assessing it, and sometimes siding against traditional norms when they are inappropriate. Noting that Oruka stated that sages possess insight and ethical inspiration, Onyango points to Odinga's insights when he declared back in the 1960s that Kenya was "not yet Uhuru (free)." He also showed insight when he predicted the coming of multiparty elections in the early 1990s.

He showed ethical inspiration in his insistence that political power be tied to morality and honor, and not lies. Onyango argues that as Descartes questioned the maxims of his day in his search for truth, so did Odinga.

To see the enthusiasm with which the topic of sage philosophy is still met is heartening. But it is also interesting to see the wide array of viewpoints displayed in our four papers. Bekele Gutema, for example, sees a success story for sage philosophy in that the traditional values of the Umira Kager clan were not swept away in favor of Western values, in the S.M. Otieno case verdict. However, Onyango praises Odinga for having disagreed with the Umira Kager clan's position, even though it is the traditional position of his ethnic group, the Luo. For Onyango, the sagacity arose in the critical thinking of Odinga, not in the traditions of the clan. Another interesting contrast is between Barasa's paper and that of Moore. Barasa bemoans the disintegration of the modern Kenyan family, as it falls prey to consumption of pop lifestyles, and wants to reinforce the strength of the extended family. He thinks that sage philosophy will help Kenyan families to find new moral purpose in life. At the same time, Moore finds sagacious wisdom in a song which (albeit in another time and place) insists on women's rights to earn their livelihood through prostitution (an occupation which some Kenyans would equate with decadent Western values). Who is the more sagacious? Or are they both sagacious, in their context? Can sage philosophy be used in such a variety of contexts? The field will grow richer as further sage philosophy researchers explore just what it means to be sagacious.

VI. PHILOSOPHY, ETHICS, AND POLITICS

Many presenters were interested in applying the insights of philosophy to the pressing problems of the African continent, especially the Kenyan participants.

Dr. Cletus N. Chukwu of the Philosophy Department, Moi University, Kenya, in his article, "African Philosophy: the Task of Addressing Contemporary Social Problems," emphasizes the practical value of philosophy, asserting that philosophy should influence African social life in a constructive way. Both professional philosophers and sage philosophers should devote themselves to the betterment of their societies. Philosophers should analyze social injustice in their nations, particularly when human rights are violated. Philosophers should also seek insights into the problems of tribalism, poverty (especially concerning women), and the clash between traditional values and those values needed for economic development.

Daniel Smith, formerly teaching at University of Ghana-Legon, recently moved to teaching English at Kunming University, China, and Philosophy at Yunnan University, China. In his paper, "Pragmatic vs. Ideological Development in Africa," he notes that Pragmatism and Marxism are two of the most common responses to philosophical questions concerning theory and practice in Western philosophy. Many of the first postcolonial governments of Africa embraced some form of dialectical materialism in their struggle for independence, and thus, a great deal of intellectual energy was invested in ideological debate and development. Today ideology is being shunned and pragmatism has become a dominant theme in the discourse of African leaders and ruling parties. Smith uses Kwame Gyekye's reconstruction of the concept of 'ideology,' and the critiques of Eurocentrism articulated by such African philosophers as V.Y. Mudimbe and Tsenay

Serequeberhan, and suggests that there is no such thing as nonideological development. He argues that the appeal to pragmatism is itself an ideological commitment that resigns itself to the prevailing conditions of development and a Eurocentric vision of human society. Therefore, African philosophers ought to commit themselves to revealing and critically evaluating the implicit ideological orientation concealed within the dominant discourse of development. An alternative vision of development and society must be constructed through regionalized democratic processes guided by a recognized need for the emergence of an ideological consensus concerning human development in the 21st Century.

Prof. D. Okoth Okombo is Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Kikuyu Campus, and Professor of Linguistics and Literature, University of Nairobi, Kenya. He is also Director of the Kenyan Sign Language Project at University of Nairobi. His paper, "The Localist Paradigm and the Kenyan Constitutional Review Debate," engaged the audience in a very timely topic, as the issue of revising the Kenyan constitution was in the news and widely debated. Okombo, in an attempt to understand the debate, deconstructs the views and perceptions of the two protagonists. Okombo noted that those from differing political positions commonly used the metaphor of "driving" the process, with questions of whether the people or parliament should drive. Okombo explores the metaphor of "vehicle," and decides that the two rival groups are using the term "driving" in two different ways: one refers to the power of the fuel, the other refers to the one who does the steering. In this way, the seemingly rival positions are not in conflict.

Mr. Oriare Nyarwath of the Philosophy Department, University of Nairobi, Kenya, in his paper "The Moral Dilemma of Corruption," argues that the practice of corruption is universally abhorrent, and due to moral depravity. In Africa, corruption makes self-improvement very difficult, and so he wonders why the fight against corruption is not more fervent, given the level of harm it creates. He surveys the causes and effects of corruption, and argues that while social and political factors may induce corruption, they are not the cause of it. Drawing upon Plato's argument that people always choose what seems to them to be the greatest good, he concludes that the true cause of corruption is moral ignorance or moral confusion. The solution to the problem of corruption, therefore, depends upon moral education, a task for which philosophers are well placed.

Dr. Gail M. Presbey, from the Philosophy Department, University of Detroit Mercy, USA, was at the time of the conference a Fulbright Senior Scholar at University of Nairobi. In her article, "African Philosophers on Global Wealth Redistribution," she notes that Lansana Keita, among others, has challenged philosophers to become concerned about economic issues in Africa. Prof. H. Odera Orika, in his article on the philosophy of foreign aid, responds to Keita's challenge and takes up the task of using philosophical skills to tackle economic issues. He uses a rights approach (based on the "right to life") to demand a "moral minimum," siding with the Basic Needs Approach in development theory. But, this acceptance of a "minimum" is in conflict with his earlier writings that demand economic equality. Odera Orika bases his argument on rights by rejecting aid (charity). Since aid as practiced now is optional, not morally required, the recipients feel self-pity. If aid was a right, it could be accepted without self-recrimination. While the paper agrees with Odera Orika's emphasis on self-respect, it charges that his rights approach is not enough (while certainly a good beginning) because it doesn't ask

the larger questions of how wealth is distributed unequally in the first place. The paper argues that his theory, which leaves production to the economists and redistribution to the philosophers, leaves a lot of questions about production and livelihood unanswered. The latter cannot easily be solved by compulsory and minimal foreign aid. The paper then looks at Segun Gbadegesin's approach. While similar in his responding to the challenge for philosophers to be "relevant," and similar in his rights-based approach, he focuses on the right to work instead of redistribution issues. It is, however, still related to redistribution issues insofar as government must fund people's capital for self-employment or else supply jobs. The paper concludes by noting that the global economy has become more hostile and moved even further away from solutions proposed by Oruka and Gbadegesin.

Prof. Joe Teffo, Assistant to the Vice Chancellor at University of the North, South Africa, and former President of the Southern Africa Philosophy Association, has written on "Racism, Ethnicity, and Nation Building in Contemporary South Africa." Teffo begins by describing sociality as the main characteristic of personhood. Delving into the issue of embodiment, he explores the existential experience of being-black-in-the-world. He also explores definitions and concepts of race, racism, nationality and ethnicity. He describes the role of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in psychological liberation. Unfortunately, the transition from notions of racial solidarity to ethnic diversity in South Africa has resulted not in celebration of difference, pluralism and diversity, but in increased xenophobia and tribal-inspired conflicts. While the idea of a non-racial South Africa was a goal that many had embraced, now racial animosity and ethnic hatred both undermine the goal. Teffo is concerned that some of the African National Congress's reforms are reverse racism, while at the same time white racist attitudes, while not backed up by law, continue on a psychological level. Teffo considers these problems to be challenges to be understood and grappled with on the way to building a rainbow nation.

Pamela Abuya of the Philosophy Department, Moi University, Kenya, presented a paper that summed up the challenges that democracy poses to African countries. She reviews the history of democracy and outlines its major characteristics. Turning to the specifics of the African context, she notes the major problem areas that could benefit by democratic practices. She outlines needed actions to make democracy a reality in Africa. The author challenges philosophers to rise to the task and duty of unearthing cultural values that may be an asset to democratic culture and practice. She ends with a program for involvement of philosophers in the transformation of African societies to democracies which respect people's rights and are responsive to their needs for development. Her paper succinctly sums up the conference deliberations and appropriately challenges philosophers.

The conference saw a good audience attendance throughout, and these papers on politics and economics drew a lot of attention. Mostly widely debated were the issues of immediate interest to Kenyans, such as Prof. Okombo's treatment of the constitutional review debate. Many who spoke found Okombo's reconciliation of the two opposing ideas too neat, and wanted instead to argue for one view or the other. Many audience members could relate to the kind of corrupt scenarios which Mr. Nyarwath illustrated casually during his talk (these concrete instances were verbal ad libs which do not appear in his paper). However,

despite their agreement on the problem, many were not convinced that Plato held the answer. In general, people were heartened to hear philosophers address issues directly addressed to human flourishing in Africa.

The conference concluded with Prof. G.E.M. Ogotu giving a “vote of thanks” to all who had participated in organizing the conference. The organising committee, especially Dr. F. Ochieng’ - Odhiambo, had labored to make the occasion a success. University of Nairobi top administrators took the event seriously and organised Prof. Beck’s visit. Many University of Nairobi Postgraduate philosophy students donated their time, attending to the registration tables and running many errands. Other University of Nairobi philosophy department members Karori Mbugua and others shuttled participants to and from the airport. All were especially thankful for the funding of East African participants’ expenses by Konrad Adenauer Foundation, without such funding and support, the event could not have been so large a success. In closing, Prof. Ogotu gave all present encouraging words to continue the sharing of ideas in future conferences.

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