AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AS CULTURAL INQUIRY

Since the early 1970s, a series of remarkable books and articles has been published that designates a subject matter called "African philosophy." Much of this work is a response to earlier attempts to describe indigenous African belief systems and the content of their significant categories (such as time, causality, or personhood) as the expression of a collectively held "African" philosophy. This earlier literature, much of which was published between 1930 and 1960, was called "ethnophiosophy" by its critics. "Ethnophiosophy" shares two features with African philosophy; its texts are largely written by African scholars who seek to explain how African culture(s) resolve those key issues also posed in Western philosophical systems. In addition, both bodies of literature are shaped by a more or less self-conscious sensitivity to the imperial and colonial histories out of which African nations have emerged.

Ethnophiosophy still has its adherents, some of whom have forged ties with Afrocentric writers (Obenga 1995), but its claims have remained relatively unchanged since they were first formulated (Karp and Masolo 1998). The literature on African philosophy, on the other hand, has exhibited significant changes, many of which were caused by the social and historical contexts in which the literature was written. The first phase of African philosophy, which began in the 1970s, is largely a critique of how colonial categories are inadvertently reproduced in ethnophiosophical accounts of African cultures, and it seeks to establish standards through which African belief and custom can be evaluated. In this phase, African philosophy tends to defend the value of philosophy in the newly independent nations of Africa, arguing that philo-
sophical training and tools provide rigor and method that are badly needed for
the task of national development. In the 1980s, the second phase of African
philosophy seeks to develop a “Philosophy of Culture,” in Kwame Appiah’s
words, that can both account for and be critical of the cultural resources that
Africans use in conducting their lives. This second phase has involved examining
not only so-called “Traditional” African culture but also such topics as the
role of African intellectuals as academics in the public life of African nations.
Related topics have included how relations with the rest of the world affect
the production of culture in Africa and its diaspora. This last topic includes ac-
counts of the relationship between race and culture, of the differences between
indigenous and global knowledge systems, and (not to mention that recursive
theme of African writing) of defining the course and causes of “development.”

The third phase of African philosophy is represented in Appiah’s book
(1992) and in the recent articles by Hountondji (1992a, 1992b) and by Wiredu
(1996) and in some of the essays in this book. In the third phase, the politics
of knowledge, always a significant theme in African philosophy, become much
more the overt subject matter of philosophical writing, especially as these polit-
ics concern such pressing issues as freedom, responsibility and the conduct of
life in civil society, and the role of the state in what Achille Mbembe (1992) has
called the “Postcolony.” As these topics have become more prominent, African
philosophy has moved from the critique of how cultural differences are defined
and valued to take a more critical stance toward such seemingly sacrosanct top-
ics as nationalism and pan-nationalism, claims to racial solidarity, and the
claim that the postcolonial period and scholarly writing about Africa exhibits
a conceptual break from the themes and epistemological practices found in the
colonial archive. This new phase of African philosophy is both a response to
and an attempt to theorize the crisis of the postcolonial African state, and it
coincides with the emergence of economic, social, and environmental problems
that were not imagined to be possible in the utopian world of newly indepen-
dent nations.

The convergences among African philosophy and other emergent forms of
postcolonial writing and criticism are striking. We provide only one example
here of another “third world discourse” that exhibits striking parallels. Sub-
altern studies in India began as a critique of Indian historiography and argued
that the specificity of the subaltern voice has been systematically erased by
both colonial and nationalist historians. For all the differences between the
political projects of these two groups of Indian historians, Guha (among oth-
ers) asserts that the ways in which they characterize the motives and culture
of subaltern groups are extremely reductionist. In his essay “The Prose of
Counter-Insurgency” (1988), for example, Guha shows that the narratives of
both groups of historians are organized by their temporal distance from the
events described and that both reduce cultural forms and religious motivations
to political projects that they define and impose on the subjects of their re-
search. During the colonial period, the historical project tended to support the
colonial hierarchy of cultures and persons that opposed rational colonial rulers
as an alternative either to natives bound by tradition or to insurgents who acted
without recourse to any external guidance (see also Karp manuscript). The
project that nationalist historians impose on the subjects of their research is the
nascent nation—intuitively sought by untutored natives who are unconsciously
acting on behalf of goals that will be achieved by the first leaders of independ-
ent nations (Chatterjee 1993).

At stake here are some of the same issues that emerge in the third phase
of African philosophy: a respect for the complexity of the motives and cultures
of subaltern agents; the complicit role of the intellectual in the power politics
and crises of the postcolonial state; the role of criticism in the politics of knowl-
dge; and the conflicts among cosmopolitan, nationalist, and indigenous forms
of knowledge. Intellectual historians and sociologists of knowledge will have

Two factors that contribute to these differing discursive locations are rele-
vant for our account of the development of African philosophy. African socie-
ties were among the last to be subjected to colonial rule by Europe, and educa-
tional institutions and disciplines in African societies were simply not as well
established or prominent at the point of political independence as they were in
India. From its beginning in the 1960s, the discipline of African history, for
example, has set itself the task of recovering a “usable past” (Vansina et al.
1964; Jewsiewicki 1989)—that is, a past that is usable for the task of building
national identity. African historians have yet to see themselves avoid writing
across the boundary between the colonial and independence eras in their work;
they also have yet to see that their concern with justifying nationalist move-
ments puts them in the position of being judge and jury to the African masses,
defining for these masses the purposes and ends of their cultures and actions.2

In India, the time that has passed between independence and the present
and the problems produced by nationalist movements have also resulted in power-
ful indictments of the ways in which Indian historians have justified national-
ism (Nandy 1995). It may be that the era of nationalist historiography is com-
ing to an end in Africa and that a new generation will feel more able to criticize
national governments, but that has yet to happen both in Africa and among
the senior generation of African historians in the United States. Hountondji's
critique of ethnophilosophy and his demonstration of its association with
nationalist politics has broken ground for this intellectual direction.

Just as history and politics have combined to affect the development of
African historiography, ideas about race have shaped the ways that African
philosophers have developed their critiques. The racially informed idea that
African conceptual systems are the product of collective work rather than the
elaborations of individuals is unthinkable with regard to Indian religion and
philosophy, which early on became the subject of the civilizational discourse
of Orientalist disciplines. By the end of the nineteenth century, European and
Indian academics alike were asking how and to what degree Indian cultural
forms exhibited the features of civilization (Chatterjee 1995). As a result, a
large body of material about Indian philosophy and religion was written to
challenge racially motivated assertions; such a body of material did not exist
for African philosophers at the end of the colonial period. Indian philosophy
was never asked to refute the idea that there were no analytic skills available in
Indian culture, while African philosophy has always had to justify the very idea
that African culture had anything remotely akin to philosophy, except at the
level of a vaguely formulated collective unconscious.

However, like subaltern studies, African philosophy has moved toward a
critical pluralism, especially in its latest phase, in which cultural and historical
complexity become the subject of the writing rather than something that is
irrelevant to the grand narratives of colonial and nationalist discourse. This
pattern of development has some important consequences for how such typical
topics of philosophy as personhood and agency or knowledge and discourse are
treated in African philosophy and shows that African philosophy and anthro-
poLOGY now exhibit some real convergence, as we argue below in Part I.

FROM ETHNOPHILosophY TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

The history of African philosophy is a history of two contesting parties.
The first of these parties has come to be known as ethnophilosophy, the study
of collective forms of culture as manifestations of African philosophical sys-
tems. The second, now known as African philosophy, argues that philosophical
practice, as a second-order critical evaluation of first-order thinking about na-
ture, culture, and experience, must be a vital activity in Africa.

African philosophers themselves can also be divided into two camps—
those who believe that technical and academic philosophy provides the tools
for a much needed critique and revision of traditional African thought and
those who argue that the critical skills and attitudes of Western philosophers
can also be found in African cultures. Both of these positions have roots in
academic and social movements in the West, including Bergson's vitalistic phi-
losophy, the philosophy of religion, Marxism, existentialism, and Freudian the-
ory as it was incorporated into the surrealist movement in modern art.

The literature on ethnophilosophy is based largely on African materials
and is written largely by Africans themselves, perhaps because anti-colonialist
and nationalist movements affected them more than other peoples, who did
not appear to exhibit the trappings of "civilization" and whose lives were encap-
sulated within settler states such as the United States and Australia. Ethnophi-
losophy's most immediate antecedents include Léopold Senghor's (1948,
1964) and Aimé Césaire's (1939) philosophy of "negritude" and the writings
of the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels, who appears to have been greatly
influenced by Henri Bergson's vitalist philosophy. Ethnophilosophy examines
the systems of thought of existing and precolonial African communities in
order to determine what might be the ideal forms of "authentically" African
philosophy and praxis in the emerging postcolonial situation. In addition to the
pioneering work of Senghor and Tempels, this school is represented in the
writings of the anthropologist Marcel Griaule (1965), of the philosopher
Alexis Kagame (1956), and of the theologians Vincent Mulago (1955, 1965,
(1967), and John S. Mbiti (1969), among others, many of whom were regarded
as Tempels's disciples.

We also include the literature that defines "African socialism" in the eth-
nophilosophical approach. This is a body of disparate materials that combines
Marxist social and economic theories with negritude's politics of difference—
all in the service of creating culturally and politically independent states in post-
colonial Africa. Julius Nyerere's theory of "Ujamaa" in Tanzania and Didier
Ratsiraka's concept of "Fokonolona" in Malagasy are two of the best-known
attempts to revalorize African culture in the terms of twentieth-century Euro-
pean social, economic, and political theory. Two works by Nyerere (1968a,
1968b) reveal that these political accounts share with other works of ethnophi-
losophy the thesis that Africans' central values are communal rather than indi-
vidual.

Both African socialism and more strictly philosophical works of ethnophi-
losophy seek to subordinate the individual to the community. While this pos-
ton seems to be non-Western and even opposed to the emphasis on the ago-
nistic individual in Western thought and culture, it actually accepts a distinct
opposition between individual and community that is itself not only Western
but also utilitarian, even bourgeois, in character.
Various contradictions are characteristic of the ethnophilosophical writings. First and foremost, these writings remain profoundly descriptive and anti-normative—that is, non-critical—about African traditions and customs. But they generally do so in the service of a discourse that is powerfully critical of colonial rule and culture. This is the basis for the criticism aimed at ethnophilsophy by the African philosophers Paulin Hountondji and Kwasi Wiredu, which asserts that critical discourse cannot exempt one side from the criticism it levels at the other side.

Perhaps even more important, however, is the criticism that ethnophilosophy is so deeply counter-hegemonic—that is, oppositional without being radical—that its deep conceptual structure reproduces the order of colonial categories. On the surface, ethnophilosophy is robustly anti-colonial, yet it still accepts the basic categories in terms of which colonial culture defines other cultures and peoples. It attempts to revalorize them instead of seeking to criticize the grounds out of which colonial discourse emerges, such as the distinction between culture and civilization or the “traditional” and the modern.

Thus, it appears that ethnophilosophy has two contradictory aspects. It is a critical discourse that defines itself in opposition to colonialism. Yet it starts by accepting the colonial categories of “traditional” and “modern.” The most significant difference between the original colonial categories and their use in ethnophilosophy is that instead of treating them as diametrically opposed, in the colonial fashion, ethnophilosophy tries to merge them by revalorizing indigenous values as worthy of attention and by then discovering the “traditional” in the modern. Thus, we argue that ethnophilsophers have attempted to create hybridized knowledge by arguing that characteristics of Western intellectual history can be found in African traditional thought, such as Kagame’s argument that African thought utilizes Aristotelian and Thomistic elements.

In trying to identify the locus of philosophical discourse in the collective mind of Africans, ethnophilosophy also reproduces the ambiguities of the colonial culture, which is itself yet another hybridized formation. Once again ethnophilsophers also produce sui generis landscapes in which the indigenous and the imported simultaneously mix and separate, combining spaces and temporalities. Ethnophilosophy differs from colonialism in that it seeks to recover the traditional past as an instrument for reorganizing European cultural hierarchies. It also makes use of the Western notion that the universal is available to all people but is only found among some of them in order to reposition Africa within this hierarchical scheme.

The most notable characteristic of the ethnophilosophy school is its characterization of philosophy as a form of narrative—in fact, as a collective narrative. Ethnophilsophers treated African philosophy as a narrative whose content is revealed through various codes: through myths, through symbolic systems, and through religious and ordinary language. In this sense, African philosophy was represented as an innate form of indigenous expression. It could only be “recovered” and revalorized into a hybridized postcolonial present. The crucial point we are making is that the ethnophilsophers’ ambiguous position indicates that they lack a location or identity in either the “traditional” or the colonial worlds. Even more important is the feature that ethnophilosophy shares with ethnographic practice—the assertion that meaning resides in collective practices. While true, this position is incomplete if it fails to show how change is produced by human agents.

Fundamentally, this ethnophilosophical literature is about the nature of change and the role of social and cultural criticism in formulating change, but it fails to specify the critic’s role in African societies or in conceptual change. By emphasizing the collective nature of thought and the importance of the social leader who embodies this thought, ethnophilosophy reproduces colonial domination in a new form of authoritarianism. It gives voice to the leader but stifles the individual voices of the masses, who have not yet mastered this new cultural discourse. This attitude is all too familiar in the political ideology of some African states.

The idea that traditional knowledge is or was collectively produced and appropriated implies that the individual cannot be free and that religious, social, or cultural criticism is impossible. This in turn raises fundamental questions about personhood, agency, and the possibility of change (Giddens 1984; Jackson and Karp 1990). These questions lead us back to Popper’s question about whether there is an intrinsic relationship between criticism and the growth of knowledge (Lakatos and Musgrave 1970). In ethnophilosophy there can be no growth of knowledge and change within the traditional context. In terms used by the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (1980), traditional knowledge is doomed to self-damnation unless it is subjected to the therapeutic benefits of dialectical and critical reflection and re-evaluation. According to Wiredu, it is wrong to claim that people in the “traditional” settings lacked the inspiration for critical thinking about theoretical and practical matters of everyday life.

The idea that some aspects of African thought are collective and unchanging has been accepted even by the critics of ethnophilosophy. As Wiredu (1980) and Hountondji (1983) have proposed, the redemption of traditional knowledge systems will require precisely three elements of Western Enlightenment thought that ethnophilosophy appears to reject—individual agency, abstract theory, and openness (as suggested also by Crahay 1965; Horton 1967; and Pearce 1992). Wiredu (1980) sees hope for this redemption in the applica-
...tion of analytic practice (perhaps simplified to the level of pragmatic common sense) as people seek new methods and solutions to problems that old methods and solutions have failed to solve. Hountondji (1983) proposes that this redemption take as its foundation the Althusserian neo-Marxist notions which specify evolving relationships among power, ideology, and a constantly changing social world. Both Wiredu and Hountondji valorize the individual as the agent of change through social and cultural criticism. In other words, Wiredu and Hountondji defend the colonial and postcolonial as the new spatial and temporal realities that Africa should neither ignore nor pretend to be able to do without. Their views suggest that the superimposition of the colonial value system, its marginalization of African knowledge and techniques, but also Africans' preoccupation with the colonial, often give the false impression that Africans lack the appropriate skills for self-propagation.

This counter-critique valorizes critical rationalism over passive cultural nationalism and favors a selective approach to the valorization and uses of the past. Its point is that the past's influence on the present should be critically appraised in order to avoid both anarchism and a blind appropriation of everything from abroad. In effect, it offers an alternative representation of the (hybrid) postcolonial social and cultural condition.

Franz Crahay's neglected paper “Le Décollage conceptuel: conditions d'une philosophie bantoue” (1965) is among the most important critiques of ethnophilosophy. Crahay argues that the colonial distinction between the “traditional” and the “modern” is analogous to a distinction he draws between “constructing myth” and “practicing philosophy.” This distinction is, in turn, similar to the metaphysical distinction between form and matter. Although form and matter make complementary contributions to the identity of things, they nonetheless remain conceptually distinct in nature and function. According to this perspective, philosophy, like form, is of the mind. It deals with those elements or categories of thought in which experience, as event and practice, is presented in and to our minds. It deals with ideas, those that are general and removed from the particulars from which they come. Though it is a human practice, philosophy is conceived as being essentially distinct from other human practices, such as folkways and traditional or any group behavioral patterns—i.e., customs, conventions, and mores.

But like matter, myths, traditions, customs, and mores are glued to the sensual. Their language remains “unabstracted” from the metaphors and experiences of everyday life; they are sociologically immediate and concrete. In this sense, then, Crahay argues that while philosophy frees itself from its conceptually limiting fixation with sociological conditions by “taking-off” to a free—i.e., universal—conceptual level, ethnophilosophy remains trapped in the (closed) confines of sociological structures and relativism, just like anthropology.

Robin Horton pushes this critique slightly farther. In his widely discussed essay (1967), he argues that religion does for traditional thought what abstract reasoning does for scientific knowledge. Trapped within the sociological immediacy of closed systems, he argues, religion—traditional religion—“explains” reality by appeal to personal and spiritual concepts. In this it differs from scientific explanation, which makes use of the abstract (non-human) concept of “particles” or forces. Myths, then, are to religious thought what philosophy is to science. And such pairs represent opposed and mutually exclusive models of knowledge. For Horton, the advent of philosophy in Africa must be predicated on a qualitative leap, that is, on an act of cultural transformation which begins with intellectual secularization and modernization.

**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AS CULTURAL INQUIRY**

African philosophy has criticized ethnophilosophy for simplistically transferring ethnographic data directly into philosophical terms and categories. But it has not altogether severed connections to the disciplinary field of anthropology. Since Crahay (1965), African philosophers have been arguing for a philosophical practice—explanations of reality or analysis of ideas in beliefs and languages—that focuses on and stems from the structure and experience of everyday life. This approach, according to Crahay, would not sidestep cultural experiences or avoid forms peculiar to Africans but rather would lift them out of narrative and description and make them “take off” (décoller) to become part of a second-order discourse. Hountondji (1983/1996) and Mudimbe (1988) take the same position as Crahay, but they place this position in the broader context of postcolonial criticism and competition among different systems of thought associated with both colonial and postcolonial realities.

Critical evaluations of the idea and uses of culture have been offered recently by several African philosophers, such as Kwame Appiah (1992), Paulin Hountondji (1992a, 1992b), Kwasi Wiredu (1980, 1996), and Kwame Gyekye (1987, 1997), among others. These critical accounts of cultural experiences and social forms in Africa open new avenues for comparative philosophical analyses; they also engage with ethnographic data derived from daily life in Africa. Mudimbe, for example, defines anthropology as part of the colonial archive but also as a means to escape the tyranny of the colonial (Mudimbe 1988: 198–200). In the wider context of working toward a definition of, to quote from Mudimbe, “an African gnosis and order of knowledge,” recent works of African philosophers raise complex issues with multiple ramifications that
cross the divide that customarily separates the work of the academy from life
in society. In doing so, these works invoke what the Brazilian educator and
theorist of education Paulo Freire wrote in his famous text *A Pedagogy of the
Oppressed*: “We need to help people to read their reality and write their own
history.” Much like African intellectuals who write and work against colonial
domination and who also theorize an ideal condition for the postcolonial sub-
jects, the question of who it is that determines *how* the post-oppression reality
is read and how its history will be written finds neither an obvious nor an easy
answer, even if it be granted that the oppression is in the past. African philoso-
phers ask themselves the following: Who is best placed to suggest which form
of culture is best for African peoples? Who defines the needs of the people and
the related epistemologies that best serve them? The debates on these issues
obviously bear on the issue of the role of contemporary African intellectuals
within the wider context of cultural discourse. In other words, they tend to
question, to borrow from Wiredu, the legitimacy of their own “points of view.”
No doubt the discussions have produced a rich debate among African philoso-
phers and other intellectuals today, and these discussions continue to define
the key concerns of African intellectuals as they bring the social experiences
of their peoples to the level of conceptual awareness. Although Wiredu and
Hountondji share similar goals in their respective proposals for a critical recov-
ery of indigenous knowledges, they propose different approaches for doing so.
With his idea of knowledge as capital, Hountondji’s strategy comes close to
Freire’s by means of their common reference to what Louis Althusser (1967:
116) calls the “reactivation of old elements” in the new (postcolonial) society.
For both Hountondji and Freire, recognition of and dependence on the
people’s values form the basis for a cultural synthesis which restores subjectivity
to locally situated individuals and groups. For both of them—Hountondji and Freire—overdetermination (of people’s historical and cultural paths by external
forces) must be replaced with self-determination in both theory and praxis. It
is important to note, however, that the value of the debates lies not in who wins
or whose representation of African cultures and their needs is more correct but
rather in their shared sense that the existence of the debate is an index of the
complex map of African cultural and historical awareness and inquiry.

Rather than dispute explicitly over the meaning or nature of the postcolo-
nial field, the authors in this collection open up new discussions, some on per-
sistent topics such as development, personhood, agency, and personal destiny.
They connect these topics to the role of philosophy in the context of African
people’s definitions of their cultural or historical experiences and the complex
social roles through which the practice of identity is defined and displayed.
The essays presented here are not in agreement regarding these issues. Several
of them utilize the idea of context as the crucial source for the construction of
meaning or readings of reality. Wiredu, for example, continues on a universalist
path, through which he challenges the political agenda addressed in postcolo-
nial discourse, distrustingly that “[t]he scope of the ‘context’ that [the others]
mobilize in analysis is necessarily a closed frame, not an open-ended plenitude
of meanings connecting . . . with other meanings and texts” (Mishra and
Hodge 1994). Wiredu’s fear is that postcolonial writing loses its chance to en-
gage with the positive values of Western modernism, from which it can both
learn and gain. He suspects that the nationalist brand of postcolonial critique is
a dangerous manifestation of the exhaustion of Western rhetoric that expresses
boredom with its own achievements rather than a movement devoted to devel-
oping pragmatically useful programs for development. This fear is legitimate
but not new. Scholars’ judgments have always differed with regard to the nature
of historical events and with regard to the effects of crucial historical events
on the evolution of historical thinking.4 Likewise, African scholars have been
divided over the question of the real value of colonialism. While some see it as
a danger to which African societies and cultures were exposed, others, those
who are more optimistic, while not endorsing colonialism, regard the period
as disclosing the road to the future.

Few African intellectuals are known actually to have praised colonialism
the way Herder, Hegel, or Droysen praised Napoleon.5 Like the latter, how-
ever, some African philosophers accept the view that the precolonial/colonial
divide separates qualitatively different historical periods, pointing out in par-
icular the gains that have come as a result of the impact of Western education.
They draw practical consequences from the cultural crisis that has been
brought about by the effects of colonial rule on the traditional views and meth-
ods.6 African intellectuals tend to agree that the years of colonial domination
shook and changed the social structures, political institutions, self-perceptions,
and thought and value systems of African peoples. But the period of critical
restoration which defines the postcolonial practice for this perspective has in-
evitably led African intellectuals to look to history for an answer to the ques-
tion, “What are the permanent forces on which society could be securely
built?” Some African intellectuals are more optimistic than others. While not
regarding colonialism as a period of splendor, they still view it as a turning
point in the sense that it awakened the critical spirit necessary for sustaining
cultural criticism and furthering social progress. This did not occur because the
West is inherently better but because its culture illustrates the benefits of uni-
versal reason: that people can acquire a measure of wisdom by using their rea-
sion properly. They can be skeptical without hanging themselves on the gibbet
of hyperskepticism. Though plagued by tempting and unanswerable questions,
people everywhere can safely assure themselves that “two and two make four,” as claimed by Voltaire. They can avoid gross error by using their senses prudently. With careful observation, discriminating argument, and constant testing, science can furnish a greater and more realistic understanding of the surrounding world.

The essays in this collection probe different sides, intellectual and social, of the attempts of African societies in the postcolonial condition to cope with the problems of social and cultural transformation. While some of them stress the restrictions which traditionalist thought sets upon any program of reform, others dramatize the ways that social actions can escape the limitations put upon them by their own cultural traditions. Together, they examine the extent to which the way we view our past affects our apprehension of the present. But not all the authors whose works are included in this collection view philosophy in this historical perspective, either in a direct manner or with the same intensity. Indeed, some of the authors included here belong to the analytic tradition in the sense that they share the view that the duty of philosophy is primarily analytic—as opposed to being either normative or phenomenological—entrusted with discovering the basic principles of knowledge through careful logical analysis. Yet this very vision is itself historically recent, both to the discipline of philosophy in general and in terms of its specific application to the understanding of concepts and ideas at work in the ordinary languages of different African peoples. Links to history, culture, and society are maintained through comparative analysis across linguistic and cultural worlds; this analysis places several non-Western philosophers in an interesting position as agents of cross-cultural communication and transfer of meanings. While this cross-cultural communication does not necessarily prove the existence of what Wiredu has elsewhere (1996) called “cultural universals,” it certainly points to multiple horizons in the philosophical landscape. Furthermore, these links have helped to reveal two features of philosophy: the infinite number of questions and fundamental issues associated with philosophy as well as the proliferation and plurality of philosophy. We would say that there is a peaceful coexistence and mutual enrichment between the phenomenological francophone and the analytic anglophone perspectives in African philosophy, which provide the view, present here, that analytic philosophy, while being important and enlightening, is only one of many philosophical styles.

Finally, both this collection and the seminar on which it is based were predicated upon our belief that the first two phases of writing about African philosophy, accompanied by questions about the philosophical legitimacy of indigenous thought, have now run their course. We believe that there is now a need to move to a new theme—the nature of discourse in the multiple and multiplex settings that exist in contemporary Africa. Examining the relationships among discourse, knowledge, and everyday life is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor, one that requires the skills and knowledge bases of both philosophers and anthropologists alike. This interdisciplinary mix enables us to study what people know and how they express their knowledge as well as how knowing and saying are contested or become authoritative. Anthropologists bring to this problem skills in social analysis, experience with understanding the situational components of expression, and a long history of interpreting cultural idioms and symbolic forms. Philosophers bring to this set of issues skills related to understanding the logic and rhetorical basis of argumentation, an interest in analyzing and defining concepts exhibited in modes of thought and practices such as science and common sense, a concern for the implications of discourse, and sensitivity to a set of issues including personhood, ethics and morality, and metaphysics. The organization of this volume brings together and blends the approaches and materials of the two disciplines. Part I, “Power, Personhood, and Agency,” combines studies of how concepts are used to achieve ends and to interpret experience with essays on the philosophical and logical status of assertions about the concept of the person in African societies. Part II, “Knowledge and Discourse,” is about the pragmatics of verbal performance and the interpretation of how the changing life world is experienced. Finally, Part III, “African Discourses on Development,” contains essays that are normative and prescriptive, essays that attempt to think through the ways in which development and modernity manifest themselves as fundamental concerns in the political and social worlds of African nations.

When we first conceived of this book, we called it African Philosophy and Cultural Criticism, but the writing of this introduction convinced us that we were placing the emphasis on the mental activities of the observer rather than on the collaboration between scholar and producer of culture, which the convergent histories of anthropology and African philosophy, as disciplines, seem to call for. After all, inquiry is a necessary prerequisite for critique. Almost all of the literature on African philosophy calls for sustained empirical investigation of African cultures and collaboration with the African producers of those cultures. This is a task that has just begun; the work of Hallen and Sodipo (1986/1997) and Odera’s (1991) studies of “sage” philosophers are promising indications that the discourse called “African philosophy” is entering a new phase. Perhaps the most important recent work is Kwame A. Appiah’s widely debated In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture, a study that uses literary and philosophical tools to critique ideas about identity, ranging from Pan-Africanism and racial notions to the claims made by his father’s matriclan in...
Asante. This present book was conceived in a spirit that is akin to that of Appiah's work. We believe in African philosophy, more properly African philosophies, but we no longer feel able to live in a world defined in terms of departmental, ethnic, or national boundaries. The Academy, the Africanist profession, and Africans themselves are not well served by the residues of the nineteenth century that make such demands on our lives. African philosophy should refuse to recognize claims to ownership, whether these are based on race, ethnic identity, nationality, or academic discipline. African philosophy belongs not only to the Africans who "make" it and the scholars who inquire about it—it lives in all the parts of the world which Africans and scholars claim as their homes. Yet we are equally aware that the relationship between the makers and inquirers of African philosophy has been a delicate issue over the decades. We believe that although they are interrelated, the practice of the distanced inquirer is different from, yet also dependent upon, that of the engaged maker of cultural inquiry.

NOTES


2. See Appiah (1992) on how philosophers can create works that envision a world with diverse and often competing ends and practices (in Mudimbe 1992).

3. Wiredu and Hountondji can be taken as representatives of the school of thought that considers "African philosophy as [a] propaedeutic for African culture," although their philosophical orientations are very different and although the remedies they propose have little in common. Hallen and Sodipo and Odera Oruka represent the "Africans as philosophers" approach, although here, too, the aims and methods of each are strikingly different. Odera Oruka relies entirely on interviews and adds his own criteria for discriminating between the conventionally wise and those he calls "sage philosophers," while Hallen and Sodipo take naturally occurring discourses of Yoruba diviners as their units of analysis. Mediating between the two schools are Mudimbe and Appiah, whose views are again derived from different European philosophies. Mudimbe draws on Foucault to uncover an archeology of colonialism which organizes the thinking and writing about the Africa of Europeans and Africans alike, while Appiah takes a more analytic perspective and seeks to understand how certain assumptions form the basis for the construction of race and identity as it is applied to Africans and people of color. While both accept the critique of ethnophilosophy developed in the work of the other scholars, they would not exempt the work of African philosophy from the same critique, nor would they dispute that the dialectical skills of guild philosophers are also exhibited in "traditional" African cultures.

4. The diversity among German scholars in their interpretations of the effects of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic invasions is a good case in point. While some of these philosophers viewed those decades as a period of crisis that revealed the dangers to which their entire history became exposed, several German intellectuals—including, it is said, Hegel—gave this period of crisis a positive interpretation, viewing it simply as a radically different stage in their own history.

5. Ibid.

6. Despite the decisive influence that colonialism exerted on historical imagination, the reality of everyday African experiences and academic discourse clearly allows for another view—that colonialism's failure fully to destroy African social systems has revealed the capacity of the traditions to preserve bonds in social life, bonds that lie outside the new social institutions. This reality has also revealed history's capacity to build a bridge between the past and present, thus directing attention to factors that have shaped the similarities and differences among the various African societies.

7. Dictionnaire in Oeuvres Complètes XIX (p. 548) and XX (p. 120).

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INTRODUCTION
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