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African Mode of Thought and Its Implications

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Abstract:

The African person can be understood in a better way by looking at his intellectual ability. This paper critically analysis some views that have been presented by some scholars doubting the mental ability of the African person, the many unfounded prejudices of the Western thought, meaning and characteristics of the term philosophy and whether African philosophy exists or not. The study was a desk research and the researcher relied on secondary data for the work. The paper establishes that all minds in the world have the same intrinsic nature. However, the modus operandi may be different, that is; the mind's disposition, the use and application. This paper reiterates that the African mind is no different from other minds and that it is not the mind which differentiates one human being from the other in terms of his race, physique, rationality or sociability in view of the negative presentation from Western Philosophers. It is emphasized that only circumscriptive forces of the environment make an African operate differently and not the African mind as such. Similarly, the paper establishes that African philosophy exists with similar characteristics to the western philosophy.

Keywords: Person, human, African mind, African philosophy, culture

1. Introduction

In order to understand the African person in a better way it is important to look at his intellectual ability. This paper undertakes a critical analysis of some views that have been presented to us by some scholars doubting the mental ability of the African person. The African has been presented as a being of a lesser intellectual ability. First this paper demonstrates the fact that all minds in the world have the same intrinsic nature. This paper analyzes the many unfounded prejudices of the Western thought. It is emphasized that only circumscriptive forces of the environment make an African operate differently and not the African mind as such.

This establishment will help the researcher to look at another controversial issue that is based on the misgivings on the African mind. This is the term philosophy, and its characteristics. Further, the paper establishes the existence or non-existence of African philosophy. This will open our way in either appreciating the African philosophy or even provide ways and means of improving this philosophy. After this analysis, the researcher looks at the consequences of ignoring or even doing away with African cultural foundations and embracing the exotic cultures. Philosophy is an off shoot of a culture. The research shows that when a culture of a people is ignored or replaced by an exotic one, there is no genuine development that can take place. The researcher holds that any political, social and even economic development of the African person without total regard to his/her culture and world view as such is the root cause of many pertinent African problems. Any genuine growth must take place within the culture where it will be enhanced by the foundations already therein. Lastly the researcher gives recommendations and a general conclusion.

2. Misinterpretation of African Thought

In order to make an analysis of the African psyche and philosophy, which have been misunderstood and misrepresented, it is important to look at and analyze the views presented by some philosophers with the view of establishing my conclusions. I state once again that the African mind is no different from other minds. It is not the mind which differentiates one human being from the other in terms of his race, physique, rationality or sociability in view of the negative presentation from Western Philosophers. According to Nyasani (1997) the nature of minds everywhere in the world in this universe is the same and their cognitive pursuit is similarly the same since it must ultimately culminate in the inevitable encounter with the natural phenomena available.

The researcher emphasizes the fact that since the natural nature of the human mind is universally the same, the modus operandi may be different, that is; the mind's disposition, the use and application. This understanding is justified by the observation that, given the same conducive and enabling circumstances, different minds are capable of reaching and affirming the same conclusions. The difference occurs not because the minds are different but because they have different perception due to diverse conditions and circumstances, making the mind suffer from circumscriptive forces of the environment (Nyasani 1997).

Even when it appears obvious and uncalled for at this point and time in history, it is important to understand that the African mind has not been viewed as equal to other human minds by different races and continents. Such cultural

prejudices are discussed and forwarded by some Western philosophers. Among them is Kant who in his work *Von den verschiedenen Rassen del Menschen* hold that mankind consisted of only one race and the original human species was white and the blacks are spiritually inferior in the human species. Simply put, Kant is of the opinion that the Africans are on the brink of civilized history and in any case, they are a hindrance to human progress. Given Kant's stature and intellectual ascendancy the researcher opines that it is unfair for him and others of his kind to draw a parallel between intellectual sophistication and non-intellectual sophistication, given that at the time there was the spirit of enlightenment and industrial development all over Europe. The researcher contends that Kant has used the wrong bench mark in arriving at the assessment. Such statements such as Kant's about Africans are only made out of ignorance and inability to appreciate the physical obstacle the human race faces around the world. It is important to underscore the fact of evenness and equality of minds as a divine endowment (Nyasani 1997).

Hobbes (1663) while commenting on a psychological theory about human nature in the *Leviathan*, states and affirms that men are naturally equal both in mind and body. Though one man may be manifestly stronger in body than another, everything considered, the difference is minimal. Regarding the faculty of the mind; Hobbes asserts that he finds yet a greater equality among men, than that of strength. For him, prudence is but experience which equal time equally bestows on all men, in those things they equally apply themselves to. However, the folly in men is that an individual will always think that he has a greater degree of wisdom than the others since he sees his own wit at hand, and other men at a distance.

All human beings have one thing in common. They have a specific identity in that they all belong to the human species. Though this position is debatable on whether two individual beings belonging to the same species, and having the same essence will be exactly the same or will be different, the undeniable fact is that they belong to the same species which is important in defining a human being. It is the researcher's submission that the African mind has not been explored to exhaustion in order to understand the African person. This is why the African has been erroneously described as brutish, cannibalistic, crude, primitive, dark, savages, pagan, ignorant etc. This attitude is witnessed even today; passing near a kindergarten school in some parts of Italy, it is not infrequent to hear the children uttering words like: *Stano passando le scimmie* (the monkeys are passing). It is this biased consideration of the African, which the Vatican commented on the need to approach African religions and thought systems with an openness of mind for a fruitful dialogue with them when it said that one cannot make any approach to an intimate knowledge of African Religious systems except by a cordial appreciation of their philosophy, because these systems which have so long remained hidden even from the most perceptive research workers, possess a logic and are more elaborate and coherent than is generally supposed (Catholic Church 1969).

Consequently, we must recognize the fact that to understand an African, we must understand his world view. This worldview establishes that all aspects of social and existential life are one. At the same time, we want to re-affirm that the wish and reality, the possible and impossible, knowledge and belief, thought and poetry, secular and religious life are interwoven and are fundamentally one. To understand the African mentality, one must survey their life as a totality. On this affirmation, Tempels (1969) opines that the persistence of these attitudes through the centuries of simultaneous evolution can only be satisfactorily explained by the presence of a corpus of logically coordinated intellectual concepts...behaviour can be neither universal nor permanent unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, a logical system of thought, a complete philosophy of the universe, of man and of things which surround him, of existence, of life, death and the life beyond.

The misunderstanding of the African mentality has brought another question: Is the African mind capable of any philosophical discourse? This paper seeks now to understand the term 'philosophy' and whether this philosophical status is possible to the African mind and whether there is a philosophy particular and distinctly African. With increased interest in African philosophy, the understanding of the person has become problematic. We are of the opinion that the problem of *homo Africanus* (African man) easily raises the problem of existence or nonexistence of the African philosophy itself. The understanding here as we have mentioned elsewhere is that to speak of African philosophy is to discern two distinct questions, namely, what specific thinking qualifies a philosophy and who exactly qualifies to be an African. Having extensively exhausted the latter let us now delve in the first.

3. The Definition of Philosophy

The term philosophy can be defined in various ways. Here definitions that meet the purpose in this section have been used. This word etymologically originates in the Greek language, (*Philosophia*) which is the union of two words, (*philia* i.e., love) and *Sophia*, i.e., wisdom), that is, love of wisdom. Wisdom in this case is the ability to find and abide with truth...of pursuing and achieving truth (Mattei 2007). Consequently, we should understand wisdom as the study of the ultimate questions, with the view of making us have and understand what is really good and true. This wisdom helps man judge all things in their ultimate causes. This term can also be considered as a rejection of mythology, mysticism, dogmatism, ignorance prejudice and fear. These cannot be justified rationally. They must be changed by critical thinking because they cannot be a secure source of truth and knowledge. Philosophy in other words must be critical, reflective and rational. Embracing philosophy from this point of view is a rejection religious and tribal wisdom. At the same time philosophy must defy the received opinions and religion. Philosophy is also defiance. It defies received opinions and received religion. It defies tradition as the sole source of knowledge. Philosophy is a defiance against, and realisation that authority, especially traditional authority does not possess a monopoly of truth. This is the realization that on fundamental issues the individual must make his/her decisions (Randal and Butchler 1971). Philosophy at the same time according to

Mbae (1988) does not support simplistic and naive explanations and revolts against both. It insists on finding rationally satisfactory answers. It must "critically question our collective image, our common sense, and our world view.

3.1. Characteristics of Philosophy

From the foregoing, it is already underlined that any philosophy must be rational, critical and reflective. This is why I have indicated that philosophy must be different from myths which are told or recited, mysticism or dogmatism. Whatever is suggested or concluded must be justified by a critical scrutiny. This is the wanting part of African philosophy. Philosophy cannot be a collective or communal activity. For a philosophy as science to exist, it must be the work of an individual who willingly goes out to his culture to retrieve that culture, questioning and critiquing it, giving it new meaning and interpretation. Philosophy according to Okere (1983) then is the product of an individual mind not of a mob or a tribe. This means that philosophy is explicit and the work of one subject, not of a more or less anonymous collectivity. It is the subject who, while elaborating a coherent discourse, the coherence can be tested by other subjects and he is responsible for that discourse. This is why philosophy is a conscious and intentional activity, not accidental or unintentional. The collective mind can only afford mythology and not philosophy. This will be traditional beliefs and practices handed down from one generation to the next, through memorisation and recitation. Philosophy we observe is also scientific due to its deductive logical conclusion or methodology. Therefore, by all means it must be systematic to arrive at sound and valid conclusion. In this case we must have like the major and minor premises to arrive at a conclusion otherwise it will fall in to fallacies.

Philosophy at the same time must deal with universals and not particular or individual circumstances or situations. This enables philosophy to come up with formulated laws or theories applicable to all circumstances and situations. The philosopher uses his mind to clarify concepts, to analyze and construct arguments and theories, to establish the truth of what he has at hand. In doing this the philosopher wants to reach true conclusions. True conclusions often disturb our common sense or our received tradition. As a matter of fact, a true philosophy usually goes against the stream, or the majority, because the majority opinion is often a composite of past intellectual struggles or convenient biases (Mattei 2007).

4. A Critical Analysis of African Philosophy

Having analyzed what the term philosophy means conventionally, let us now have a critical look on the African philosophy to establish whether this concept applies to the African mind, and consequently the African person.

From the above characteristics, it is obvious that the first thing that we admit is that any philosophy must have some degree of objectivity and African philosophy is not an exception. I submit that a lot of time and energy has been spent making an emotional defence of African philosophy or African rational capabilities. I have already shown that rationality is not a prerogative of one privileged culture. There is no difference in rational abilities between the African and the European. The minds of men are the same in nature. It is only the environment and exposure that affects the disposition. If the African did not develop a rational philosophy, it was not because he was incapable of doing that. It was simply because the conditions under which he operated did not favour such as a development (Olela n.d.). On the other hand, it is important to have a coherent body of knowledge acceptable as philosophical in nature and be able to identify those author(s) of this body of knowledge, the philosopher behind this knowledge. This means that the work must be systematic, rational and critical in nature. This criterion of what philosophy is makes us not to be quick to affirm its existence even when we don't dismiss it at the same time. This research shows that writing first existed in Africa before Europe. How come that if the same philosophy started in Africa there are no writings about the same? It looks absurd to assert firmly and uncritically the existence of African philosophy without its writings and the very philosophers behind the said philosophy. We are forced to liken this understanding with Oruka's critique of those who are unable to define African philosophy and want all to believe in its existence. He says that when may be a superstition is paraded as 'African religion', and the White world is expected to endorse that it is indeed religion but an African religion. What in all cases is mythology is paraded as 'African philosophy' and once again the White culture is availed to endorse that it is indeed a philosophy but an African philosophy. What is in all cases a dictatorship is paraded as 'African democracy' and the White culture is again expected to endorse that it is so (Oruka 1972).

It is important to note from the preceding that culture and thought system almost always determine and control the development of any society of people. However, every culture is not a philosophy though philosophy grows out of a culture. At the same time no culture is known to have always produced a philosophy. In this understanding culture does not imply philosophy but philosophy is according to Okere (1983) an offshoot of culture. Such offshoot must be a clearly documented event. We would be hesitant here to make a rushed judgement confirming that philosophy exists in a given culture without the consideration of the above. Many renowned personalities and philosophers have again argued that the Africans had sages who can be said to be sages like Aristotle or even Plato. A philosopher focuses on the present underlying issues with the intention of finding answers and recommendations for the future. In the process they discovered new ideas, knowledge and solutions for the future challenges. The sage can be said to be a custodian of what the tribe held to be its wisdom. He was able to memorise and reproduce received opinions and traditions. Can the sages be said to be philosophers in the strictest sense of the term? A philosopher has always to be reflective, critical and ready to question the existing traditions and thought systems.

4.1. *The Epistemology of African Philosophy*

Having given a critical look on what philosophy is and the misgivings on African philosophy, it is important to note that our ancient African society did not necessarily need the philosophy that was thriving in Europe. Okere (1983) notes that, the conditions under which the Africans lived were to do more with direct involvement with daily life (the concrete aspects of life) than with the self-conscious deliberations of the early Western man. The epistemological question has always to do with knowledge, what is knowledge, its nature and scope. African philosophy has its basis on Socrates' "Know thyself". When the question is asked; who is an African man? First, he has to define himself. He has to know what he/she is and make it known to others. Important here is that he/she must never define himself by positing himself because in so doing, he will be opposing what he is not. The one which he/she is not is different from him (Akamba 1988). This has been the greatest problem in trying to unearth what African philosophy. Even when we admit that the ethno-philosophers, the sages and others may not have been philosophers per se in the strict sense of the word, nevertheless we recognize that in recent years some philosophers have sought to interpret the available data to develop a creative, critical and reflective philosophy. This they will achieve if they seek to understand the African identity and psyche.

It is imperative to admit that we no longer live in a traditional society, that the old conditions have changed and people's mode of thought too. Through infiltration of western lifestyle, culture and values, the African has been forced to change and readjust his mode of thinking. This brings a lot of confusion. But it is important to state that our conditions as Africans are different from those in Europe but we have used the modified Western philosophy to meet our needs of our time. The African ought to find a proper African philosophy to face imported philosophy.

The conception of African philosophy has been reproached for just being a world view. However according to Akamba (1988) one should notice that every philosophy starts with a world view and comes back to a world view. Every discourse is. Be it the philosophy of science, be it political philosophy or social philosophy, we always start from a world view in order to present another world view. This world view can be understood to our understanding not by following the stranger's criteria but an African one. This is particularly so in reference to the language. While we acknowledge that various philosophers have used languages that are not originally theirs, we submit at the same time that it is true foreign languages convey not only the culture but also foreign ideologies and can be used as tools of domination. It is important therefore to master African languages not only to facilitate contacts between African elite (philosophers and the African grassroots) but will also help us to better apprehend some culture realities (Akamba 1988).

4.2. *Undeniable Existence of African Philosophy*

After that critical analysis of what philosophy is and the misgivings on African philosophy, we admit again that African philosophy exists. It is observable that the conditions in which the African lived were concerned with the concrete aspects of life. Compared to the Western man, the African lived by mythologies and religious thinking other than self-conscious, reflective and critical deliberations. It is from this observation that Nyasani (1997) observes that Community norms are merely received but never subjected to the scrutiny of reason to establish their viability and practicability in the society. Maybe, it is because of this lack of personal involvement and personal scrutiny that has tended to work to disadvantage the African especially where they are faced with a critical situation of reckoning about their own destiny and even dignity. The researcher acknowledges that all cultures start with mythologies, religious or magical thinking before they develop into a philosophical mode of thought. The society has undergone drastic changes and though important, we acknowledge that we no longer live in a traditional society. It does help to admit that the experience of slavery, first and second world wars, and the eventual colonization has transformed the African mode of thought, making the African absorb some foreign ideologies and philosophy as his condition and the entire world view changes. It is time then that the African must address himself of the endemic and congenital trait, a natural benign docility brought about by years of blind social submission and unquestioning compliance.

We must admit here that the mere collection of data is a prelude to African philosophy. Thanks to God many African philosophers in recent years are emerging to interpret and question this data in order to develop a critical and articulate philosophy. This can only be done by searching the African identity. In other words, we need to have a philosophical penetration, the outline of the basic principles of a conception of a truly African universe. Oluwole (1992) looks at African philosophy and observes that like all attempts to locate existing traditions in their various forms, we must start with the collection, analysis, interpretation and synthesis of African literary pieces because they come down to us mostly in fragments. This was what was done to the early Greek thinkers. The researcher notes the need to go back to studying African Traditional thoughts which bear on the problem of human existence with the aim to unveil an existing literary tradition as an objective which is common to every rational endeavour of African thinkers. This is the only way in which we can come up with a cogent analysis of a tradition that genuinely constitutes an African literally goal (Oluwole 1992). It is from this understanding that Kahiga (2004) says that we must shake off the fetters of mythologies, superstitions, gods, magic and related attitudes which are uncritical mental attitudes (un scientific or pseudo –scientific attitudes) which keep the African in the cave of under-development. Renaissance has dawned in Africa and it is now ripe for diverse critical philosophical discourses. The African is no exception. His general orientation and areas of emphasis might understandably be different from those of his American or European counterpart, but to philosophize, and in the African context, remains an inescapable imperative for him the prospects for its future (philosophy's) growth and development are firm, bright, and irreversible.

According to Gyeke (1987) even though we didn't have an indigenous written philosophical tradition in Africa (with exception of Ethiopia and ancient Egyptian philosophy) and therefore lack of a guide to the Africans "perceptions of the nature of African philosophy and constitute a coherent and viable conceptual and normative framework that they

explore and develop, we are persuaded to admit that the absence of writing does not justify the assertion of the inexistence of philosophy in present, traditional African thought. This is what has made some contemporary African philosophers to maintain that African philosophy is still in the making or is yet come (Gyeke 1987). Such thinking leads to the rejection of African philosophy. Writing we insist is not a prerequisite of, for a philosopher. A case like that of Socrates, who never wrote, although his philosophy is articulated and written by Plato illustrates this fact. The mere word philosophy (one could ramble on for a long time about its etymology) is not enough to express everything there is to say and it is only by analogy that the meaning which Western Europe attributes to this term may be qualified as philosophical. A philosophy again is defined by its problem. Here we must again look at where and what are the problems of African philosophy. What is the specificity of African philosophy and are these problems only peculiar to Africa or do other civilisations also pose them? These questions or problems arise out when a conscience takes hold of them, poses them. We must therefore seek as African philosophers the problems which Africans pose themselves. To say the least, we must have a conceptual take off because philosophy from this understanding is a conceptual response to human problems at different epochs. Kahiga (2004) affirms this view when he observes that the African philosophy must not be a disinterested search for knowledge but it is vital to look for relevance and apply it. The socio-political and economic realities that face us must be looked at critically with the view to addressing them and offering possible solutions.

At this age we acknowledge, the African philosopher cannot ignore the fact that the world is much better advanced in scientific technology. He must therefore encourage scientific thoughts that have a bearing in technology because the secret of any development lies in the usage of scientific technology. In other words, the African philosopher does not need to apply intuitionistic and emotional approaches to tackling his philosophy as the case might have been with ethno-philosophy...the urgent task now is to gain full understanding of the scientific and analytic methods of inquiry in answer to existential problems of philosophy in line with modern technological trends (Kahiga 2004).

What this paper firmly asserts is that we need a philosophy that is practical and concrete and able to solve the problems of Africans. It must not be a philosophy that is abstract and disinterested with African affairs and problems. Since these problems are persistent, this should make the African philosophy more concrete and practical aimed at changing society and problems of daily life. This is to say that serious political, social and economic problems that have bedevilled the African continent today need home grown solutions. Such solutions according to Makumba (2007) have to be true to cherished African values, while remaining in harmony with the universal heritage of humanity. The search for African philosophy must not be a camouflage for evasion of rigour in favour of costly second grade problem resolutions. Makumba (2007) opines that this philosophy must be responsible and responsive; listening to the needs of the African people and taking a guiding role in the way politics conscious to the African individual in particular and the human person in general should be conducted.

The researcher carefully observes that the Western world presents the African individual with a formidable set of circumstances and requirements he is conditioned not to challenge, is dependent on and from which he cannot escape. This is why Makgoba(1997) observes that Africans must have a philosophy that is able to solve his problems, otherwise he will remain subjugated forever. He keenly observes the motives behind the interest of the West on the African people when he says that knowledge about African people is always political, useful in maintaining intellectual neo-colonialism, propagates Western culture, helps generate and perpetuate an inferiority complex(in Africans), fosters individualism amongst Africans, disrupts organization and unity in the (African) community because there is an inherent fear of a united, organized Afrocentric community, or a combination of all the above. It is important to note here that the African should realize his potential and destiny. This cannot be achieved by being controlled, policed, nursed and guided by the foreign powers. Africans must become masters of their destiny. This is achievable by having a philosophy directed towards solving indigenous problems through a relevant philosophy that is locally applicable.

It is my conviction that, though there are some good Western elements, Africa must never adopt and assimilate wholesale whatever the West has to offer. If this is done the unfortunate result is self-dehumanization and outright self-subversion both in terms of dignity and self-esteem. This will lead to social and cultural demise, an effective alienation. Africa should chart its future from its indigenous cultural traditions and adopt and adapt only those aspects of non-African cultures that are compatible with Africa's needs, goals, circumstances, namely a scientific perspective and Western educational practices. What is true is that there has been some kind of cultural forgetfulness, occasioned by the encounter of African culture and Western culture. True African values have been discarded without any replacement, leaving a cultural vacuum or emptiness. This point is well gasped by Mbiti (1990) when he says that one of the sources of severe strain for Africans exposed to modern change is the increasing process (through education, urbanization and industrialization) by which individuals become detached from their traditional environment. This leaves them in a vacuum devoid of a solid religious foundation. They are torn between the life of their forefathers which, whatever else may be said about it, has historical roots and firm traditions, and the life of our technological age which, as yet, for many Africans has no concrete form or depth. The effect of this fissure is a serious cultural instability. To ground our philosophy on a culture that is not solidly grounded will be in vain. When our values hang between two cultures, more disintegration is expected. On this front, we need a dynamic cultural retrieval.

5. Significance of Understanding the African Personality to Development

For many years Africa was subjected to Western colonial control and when the African countries attained self-independence the culture of colonialism continued in form of cultural and intellectual colonialism. This is why we have Western dominance in technology. Today, the Western concept of development (materialism) has encroached the African mind, thereby negating Africa's fundamental values, thus undermining the African personality. Any meaningful

development must enhance the attainment of the people's innate and essential values. Even when we concede that we live in different times, the *weltanschauung* of the African person remains the same. Kayolo (1988) observes that the Western concept of development created an imbalance between the material and spiritual development of the people in favour of the former. Such a situation could not motivate a desire or moral will among the people to promote common interests for the realization of the ethics of common good. Instead it fostered a tendency towards individualism which is socially unhealthy and disruptive, and also fostered an increasing gap between the poor and the rich. Oluwole (1992) observes that a development with a sense of humanism is what is wanted. He says that the African pursuit of humanism as a concern for human behaviour and existence is its greatest cultural heritage to the whole world. If it is underplayed and ignored because it does not follow the fashion of science, the misunderstanding it and so miss the important, better half of what makes human existence meaningful...if we want progress in all regions of human endeavour, we must learn what civilisation consists in terms of native contributions and outside borrowings...synthesis of different cultural literally attitudes I personally regard as one of the greatest contributions towards human understanding and development.

From the preceding we can affirm that a development that does not promote egalitarianism, negates the centrality of man in development, his inward dignity, integrity and value so that he cannot understand wholly as a material and spiritual being, cannot hold ground. At the same time, it cannot foster social cohesion and harmony, aspects which are essential in African traditional thought. This ultimately will lead to the disintegration of the spiritual being man, thereby losing his opportunity for growth and self-realization. Consequently, development in Africa should have its foundation in a philosophy that is intrinsically African and which respects and pays special attention to African values and ideals. This in itself does not entail rejection of modern values and modes of thought but Africa must appreciate the desirable values from other exotic cultures and races to enrich itself for faster and quick growth. What we want to firmly assert is that if Africa has to achieve any genuine development, it can only be based on local foundations. This is why African philosophers must now research exhaustively on the traditional African thought. This they must do by the power of reason other than communal consensus to develop a philosophical thought based on culture. This in essence means they have to go according to Kahiga (2004) to the roots, to the cultures to unearth conceptual fossils.

Looking at Africa today, we realize that there are many political challenges. In Kenya for example, the issue of tribal clashes, tribalism, corruption and individualism need to be given an African solution, where the emissaries were sent to negotiate on underlying issues and an amicable solution was reached at. The judicial system in Africa worked well for the people, where the punishment meted on an offender was given by the community through the elders who were people's representative and the process of re-integration was done through the same community. This meant that the offence was in away committed to the community. This made the community homogeneous and peace prevailed. Wiredu (1996) in regard to the preceding observes that to ignore our own culture and betake ourselves exclusively to the promptings of that of the West in our philosophical thinking would be a manifestation of nothing but a deeply engrained colonial mentality

Africa needs development that is integral, meaning that, a development which takes note of our traditional values and ethos. It must never be a development that leads to the erosion of "our cherished values, a development that dehumanizes us and takes no note of ethics and environment as is the case in Western countries. The sure way to make a photocopy of Western development is by ignoring deep relevant research into the traditional African conceptual scheme (Kahiga 2004).

6. Culture and Traditional Thought Systems

It is important here first, to define the term culture to enhance our understanding. Many definitions have been given depending on who is defining this term. Essential to note here is that a culture must have something of intrinsic value of a society which projects it and distinguishes it from any other society. This is because culture is a complex including knowledge, belief, art, morals, legal and customary bodies and all other abilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of a given society (Taylor 2010).

Following the above description, the culture of a given people cannot be indifferent to the role determining its development. Though we admit that different cultural perceptions have been a contributing factor in polarization and even inter-tribal conflicts, and that the same culture has been largely influenced by exotic cultures, we hold that the transformation is not intrinsic but extrinsic. The substance is never affected by the flux of accidents. It is wrong to assume that since the African culture has undergone substantial transformation, they are corrupted, obliterated or subverted to have any positive value. It is our submission that this view is overly extreme. We observe that development cannot take place in Africa outside the culture of the people. Where people have an authentic cultural awareness, a natural affection and practice, development will take place. The reason is simple says Nyasani (1997) that development is an integral process which incorporates the native culture component.

What we have said of culture and development, presupposes for a rational development process, that pays due attention to traditional values and aspirations. It is important that any thought system is born out of repeated cognitive experiences that are devoid of conceptual contradictions. This is the experience of the people's immediate surroundings. Given that, though not always, philosophy grows out of a culture, to understand the African thought system, the African philosophy, we must trace it in the African culture.

7. Conclusion

This paper concerns the concept of the person in general and the African person in particular. The human person has been the concern of various philosophical schools of thought and can be said that it has been at the centre of

philosophical inquiry in recent times. We have demonstrated this fact all through, exposing concurring and contradicting views. First, we have explicated the concept of the person in general, understanding the etymological origins of the term. We have explored the diverse views of various philosophers and their understanding of what constitutes personality. The person is an individual (numerically distinct from another and undivided from itself) substance of a rational nature. Substance excludes all accidents and their accidents cannot constitute a person. What differentiates the human person, from other animals is the rationality. We state that not every substance is a person. Only individual substances of a rational nature are. This rationality makes a person be able to determine himself, have freedom to choose good or evil, his end and means of attaining that end. This is why we say the person is spiritual because he is capable of performing such intellectual acts such as thinking and willing. We have again established that the person has a complete and self-subsisting character. Consequently, there is a definite incommunicability or uniqueness of the person. Wojtyla (1993) underlines this understanding when he says that we must pause at the irreducible, at that which is unique in each human being, by virtue of whom he/she is not just a particular human being, an individual of a certain species but a personal subject. Only then do we get a true and complete picture of the human being. At the same time the human person is dynamic as he/she is open to future, and his actions and being spiritual transcends motion and time. This is why existence and intellectual nature (essence) are constitutive of a person. The activities of a person are not constitutive of the person but come as a result of the being of the person.

On the same plane, this paper has demonstrated that the individual can be seen from his internal processes of the conscious intellect, of a feeling, emotional and acting individual substance of a rational nature, the bearer of values as indicated by Scheler (1973). A person does not consequently manifest himself only as a pure rational being but also as emotional being and reveals himself through his own acts. The research has established that conventionally, the person is more than what he appears outwardly. A person is the subject of consciousness and a force capable of thought and experience. The person is therefore the subject but also is the object of activities. We have expounded that the person cannot be identified solely as one with self-consciousness. This will deprive all others without consciousness personality like babies who have not yet reached the age of reason, the sleeping and the comatose. This will have far reaching negative moral consequences.

In analysing the person further, we have found out that the person is a relational being who has capacity for interpersonal relationship with others in his community and has three basic characteristics. One of them is the vocation which means that every individual person has unique and particular meaning for his existence. This means that the person cannot be substituted in the place he occupies in the world of persons and has his own unique place in nature. The other characteristic is action which implies that the person is always a continuous and dynamic activity aimed at actualizing himself. This means that the human person has potentialities and he is never a complete project. Inherent in the human person is the urge to go beyond all previous achievements, one is always unsatisfied with results already acquired, and one can never say that this much and no more is enough of what is required of the person. This actually makes the person self-transcendent because of the fact that he is spiritual and rational. At the same time, communication as the other characteristic implies encounter with others, the movement towards others. For such communication to be fruitful, it must be authentic, in which the two enter into dialogue, in which each person sees the other person as the other. This is why Husserl (1970) says that the human person is essentially a being with the others in the world. What is clear from our analysis is the fact that a fundamental aspect of the relational framework of subjective experience is the phenomenon of the inter-subjectivity, the appearance of 'the other' as a structural component of the world in which the human person lives. The implication here is that though man is an individual ego, he is not an isolated ego and the ultimate reality of human life is not an affair of the sovereign individuality of a single self but of man's relatedness to the world.

From the general analysis of the person, we have focused on the understanding of the person in the African community. The problem of homo Africanus, his nature and status as individual is pertinent in African philosophy. One problematic notion is Mbiti's concept when he notes that I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am (Mbiti 1990). We have shown that the individual from birth has to be identified with something already existing (norms, customs, rules, beliefs and practices he/she finds in the community). This view we have expounded that it looks at the individual from the outside and not from inside in relation to self. Such understanding of the individual would make him totally dependent on the activities, values, projects, practices and ends of the community and consequently diminishes his/her freedom and capability to choose or question or re-evaluate the shared values of the community. It is admissible that there are attributes that can be delineated as belonging essentially to man i.e. rationality, having a capacity for virtue, for evaluating and making moral judgements, being capable of choice. The community does not create them, it discovers and nurtures them. This is why in the community the individual may affirm, amend or refine existing communal goals, values and practices and at times even reject them. While the community may influence the individual's personality when it recognizes the individual, gives him status etc, nevertheless the individual personhood remains. Accidental characteristics as height, gender, marital status or social class is not the basis of personhood. Personhood is prior to and independent of such acquisitions. Therefore, the individual and the community must exist reciprocally, contributing to the growth and existence of each other. In this treatise we have expounded the reality that an African person is a process. He/she can be understood from the rites of passage that cover the whole existential life of the person. The moments of naming, initiation, marriage and death marks times of new beginning and transition from one life stage to another for the individual. Therefore, a person is not only originated and sustained by processes but is in fact ongoing and inexorably characterized by them. This process is important in understanding the person for development and transformational process. At the same time, in Africa nothing happens by chance. Some force is believed to be behind, a force that can either cause the various ills in the society or employed for curative, protective, productive and preventive purpose. These various aspects

of African behaviour offer a holographic entry to African thought and the necessity of understanding of this vital force whose source is God. Vital force is the reality which is supreme in man. We have further established that if one would want to expose African person and philosophy, one must study African religion. The different attitudes, beliefs and traditional practices must be studied to understand a person. Religion is the strongest element in the social and traditional background and exercised a strong influence upon the thought and life of the African person. Religion permeated all aspects of life.

Regarding the mind of the person, the researcher has established that every mind in the world has a universal nature. The African mind only finds itself steeped in peculiar conditions and unique circumstances; the African mind will necessarily be bound to be different in its external operations though it maintains its intrinsic nature.

It is the nature of the self to be always more than itself. To be a human person means to self-transcend towards the infinite. Every action that a human being performs is a search for self-transcendence. Therefore, transcendence becomes the final actualization of the potential authenticity of the human person. To be fully human, man/woman must transcend himself and seek the ultimate reality and meaning in life. For the African, the greatest desire is to reach eternal life, to know God in his totality.

In the last chapter, the researcher looked at the misinterpretation of the African thought by the Western world and the unfortunate implications. We have at first argued that it is not the mind which differentiates one human being from the other. Since the natural nature of the human mind is universally the same, only the *modus operandi* may be different, that is the mind's disposition, the use and application. This happens because of different perception due diverse conditions and circumstances, making the mind suffer from circumscriptive forces of the environment (Nyasani 1997). Having established that all minds in their intrinsic nature are the same, the misgivings on the African mind and ability (their ability to think logically) has forced us to define the term philosophy. We have critically argued the meaning of this term exposing the weakness of the African mode of thinking and philosophy. While we admit there is African Mode of thought and philosophy, the question, 'what is it' has not been exhaustively answered. From the preceding it is concluded that to answer the above question, we must shake off the fetters of mythologies, superstitions and related attitudes which are uncritical mental attitudes. These attitudes keep the African in the cave of underdevelopment. Our philosophy as Africans must be defined by our problems. At the same time African philosopher must be conscious that the world is much better advanced in scientific technology. The African must encourage scientific thoughts that have a bearing in technology because the secret of any development lies in the usage of scientific technology. At the same time, we have underlined that for genuine African development it can only be based on local foundations while appreciating the desirable values from other exotic cultures and races to enrich itself for faster and quick growth.

8. References

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