

**African Philosophy**  
**and**  
**The Challenge of Innovative Thinking**

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that the continued emphasis on ethno-philosophy and the relative absence of intellectual passion and curiosity are the greatest challenges facing African philosophy. The paper rejects the racist lamentation of scholars such as Olufemi Taiwo who blame the West for Africa's absence from the stage of world philosophy. It highlights the link between L.S. Senghor's doctrine of negritude, the philosophy of Innocent Asouzu, and the emerging synthesis of *consolationism* to underline the fact that African philosophy has made some progress, although things could be much better. The paper concludes by urging African philosophers to be more radical and innovative in their thinking, as innovation and originality are the only conditions for the universal acceptance of, and interest in, African philosophy.

## **Key Words**

African philosophy, complementary reflection, consolationism, mood

## **Introduction**

That African philosophy as a tradition has come to stay is beyond dispute. That Africa is largely absent from the stage of world philosophy, and, by implication, world intellectual history, is equally incontrovertible. A people's level of philosophical advancement is always a measure of their intellectual development. Although we can assert the existence of African philosophy, our confidence diminishes and threatens to evaporate altogether when the question is asked whether this tradition has justified its existence. The failure to achieve this justification by far accounts for the peculiar absence of Africa from the stage of world philosophy. While it is true that racial considerations must be factored into the dilemma of African philosophy, we must remember that we are in the information age which is also an intellectually liberal age. It will be tantamount to crass intellectual dishonesty for white intellectuals to ignore African philosophical masterpieces -

whenever these masterpieces emerge - for the reason that such masterpieces are the products of men and women with black skins.

While it is true that ethno-philosophy marked a watershed in the history of African philosophy, it cannot advance African philosophy beyond the foundation level which it actually is. Ethno-philosophy is the foundation of African philosophy rather than the definitive African philosophy because it represents the first attempt to render the worldviews of the various African tribes<sup>1</sup> in a philosophically intelligible mode, thereby reducing oral philosophy to written philosophy and launching African philosophy as a written tradition, in the very process of the systematization of tribal worldviews.

Hegel's conviction concerning the incapacity of the black African to think rationally, as expressed in his *Philosophy of History* (1991), has continued to elicit righteous fury from African philosophical scholars, who have left the substance of his statement (no doubt inspired by ignorance) to chase shadows. In this paper we will argue that:

1. Hegel's error should be interpreted by contemporary African philosophers as a call to Africa to take note of its philosophical stagnation, and to engage in the kind of radical thinking that can move African philosophy forward.
2. African philosophical scholars have not done enough to win international acclaim for African philosophy.
3. The emergent philosophical currents of complementary reflection and consolation philosophy have paved the way for the 21st century eclipsing of ethno-philosophy towards greater innovation and radical individuality in African philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word 'tribe' or the plural form 'tribes' in this paper to underline uniqueness or separateness and primordiality.

4. Since our own shortcomings rather than Hegel and Western intellectual racism is largely responsible for the inferior status of African philosophy in the global scene, the work of earning international acclaim for African philosophy must now begin in earnest.

The next section highlights Hegel's misconception about the African's capacity for abstract thought, and considers the reactions of some African scholars, especially Taiwo's eloquent response in the essay "Exorcizing Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy" (1998). The subsequent section reconsiders the state of African philosophy today and the continued dominance of the ethno-philosophical sub-tradition which prevents the African intellect from liberating itself from the grip of mythology and the tribe. Thereafter, we trace the birth of an authentic African rationalism from Senghor's negritude to Asouzu's complementary reflection. The last section before the conclusion briefly introduces the emergent current of consolation philosophy as an example of the innovative, individual thinking of the future and the radicalization of Senghor and Asouzu.

### **The Hegelian Misconception**

At the heart of the great fury among many African philosophers is Hegel's submission that the category of universality is alien to the mental structure of the African, insisting scandalously that "The Negro, ..., exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence or morality - all that we call feeling - if we are to comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this character" (Hegel 1991, 93).

Denying rationality to Africans is the same thing as saying they are incapable of producing philosophy (Njoku 2002, 8.). Yet we cannot help but agree with Mbiti (1969, 1) that some sort of philosophy underlies the thought and practice of all peoples. Murungi (2010) takes umbrage at Hegel's sacrilege and bemoans the West's exploitation of Africa. Similarly waxing eloquent on

the same theme refined, Taiwo (1998) demands: “Why is there so little, if any, respect for and, as a consequence, interest in African phenomena and their philosophical resonances?” He thinks that this unfortunate state of affairs can be traced to the Hegelian misconception and its evolution and mutation over the years in the Western mind. In other words, as he sees it, there is a racist motivation behind the unwillingness of Western philosophers to pay attention to African philosophy, even though they gladly explore the possibilities of Oriental philosophies. Taiwo (1998) permits us a moment of truth when he declares that “the West, in constructing the universal, instead of truly embracing all that there is, or at least what of it can be so embraced, has merely puffed itself up and invited the rest of humanity, or the educated segment of it, to be complicit in this historical swindle.”

Taiwo notes that contemporary Western philosophers may not be as crude as Hegel was, but that they have refined the tactics of marginalization. For instance, works of African philosophy considered unworthy of sitting in philosophy shelves are redirected to Anthropology, Political Science, Folklore, and African Studies shelves. Taiwo (1998) concludes with telling disappointment: “What is worse, even the limited presence in the form of libel that members of Hegel’s generation represented in their writings has been expunged by their contemporary numbers: hence the peculiar absence. Africa is not overtly condemned as it was in Hegel’s day; it is simply ignored or made to suffer the ultimate insult of having its being unacknowledged. One is right to wonder whether it is worse to be libeled than to be passed over in silence.”

The assertion by Horton (1993, 2) that Western languages (for example English and German) and Western paradigms provide a standard and universally current medium for the comparison of Western and non-Western thought systems appears to support Taiwo’s fears that there is a Western conspiracy to shut out Africa from world philosophical discourse. However, the claim that there is a conscious racial conspiracy to denigrate the black intellect is debatable. Could it be that we Africans have not done enough to make African philosophy competitive on the world stage? The most appropriate response to the Hegelian misconception and the intellectual

perversity of Hegel's descendents is to think radically, individually, and with a level of originality no longer to be found even in Western philosophy itself.

### **African Philosophy Today**

A reader going through a typical African philosophy text will be struck by the intensely polemical character of what goes by the name African philosophy. The dominance of polemic in African philosophy can be explained by the absence of original philosophers. In the absence of originality, analysis is compelled to serve polemic rather than substantive thinking. Ethno-philosophy, the dominant school in African philosophy, alone produced flashes of originality over a long period, with the investigations of eminent thinkers such as Gbadegesin (1991), Wiredu (1998), Gyekye (1995), Oruka (1990), and others unearthing tribal philosophical views that are distinctly African. Yet the ethno-philosophical enterprise restricted the initiative of the individual thinker by tying him to the tribe, for which the entire enterprise has been criticized by universalists such as Hountondji (1996, 63ff) and Asouzu (2007, 40-47), and hermeneutic thinkers such as Theophilus Okere (1983, 15).

Nevertheless, I think that as the foundation of African philosophy, ethno-philosophy can only be disparaged when it equates itself with the whole of African philosophy. The greatest challenge to African philosophy is that of negotiating the transition from ethno-philosophy to individual thinking independent of the tribe. The future of our tradition lies with originality and individuality. I do not blanket-condemn ethno-philosophy: after all, our own individuality takes off from the launch pad of ethno-philosophy. The point I emphasise is that it is time for African philosophy to grow robustly and, in the process of growth, justify itself as a tradition worthy of universal acclaim. While admitting that African philosophy has won a grudging recognition thanks to the ethno-philosophers, Asouzu (2007b, 292) writes: "A greater difficulty relates to what it takes to uphold this recognition. This can only happen through sustained constructive efforts to make it [African philosophy] attractive. By every indication, this appears not to be the case always going by the state of philosophy in most institutions of learning in Africa today."

Do we really take African philosophy seriously, or are we resigned for ever to being led by the Western philosophical imagination? My pessimism springs from the realization that philosophy departments in African universities propagate the ideas of Western philosophers far more than they promote those of African philosophers. Lecturers and students alike sniff scornfully at African philosophy. There is an explanation for this regrettable perversity. These lecturers and students cannot see why they should waste their time studying a tradition that has largely failed to produce exciting thinkers. In other words, the contempt arises from the near complete absence of original and radical ideas in African philosophy. African students are awe-struck by the mighty achievements of Western philosophy. Not surprisingly, they compare Western philosophy with African philosophy, and scorn the latter when they realize that Africa cannot boast of its own Spinoza, Marcel, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Santayana, etc.

In response to my concern above, some of my readers will say that there is no need for African philosophy to seek universal acceptance or the approbation of the West. This position is true if it means we do not have to be subservient to the West. However, I must disagree with the position if it seeks to isolate African philosophy from Western philosophy, because philosophy is a universal intellectual engagement, and it will do humanity much good if diverse philosophical traditions meet in dialogue that involves reciprocal respect.

Makinde (1998) is definitely not a believer in isolation, for he has asked the West to step in and save African philosophy from extinction, raising this lamentation: “If the prevailing condition of philosophy in Africa is anything to go by, we may just as well begin to sing the *Nunc Dimittis* of this important discipline in Africa. .... I do not foresee the growth of philosophy as we would have wanted it in Africa, unless such drastic situation occurs such as would bring about a reversal of fortune for the discipline” (Makinde 1998). Even as he believes the West can save African philosophy, he is not sure what form the Western intervention should take. Can we dare to say that the intervention sought by Makinde can only come from within Africa itself in the

form of innovative thinking and radical individuality on the part of African philosophers in the 21st century?

It is noteworthy that unlike Taiwo (1998), Makinde (1998) has not blamed Hegel's children for the parlous state of African philosophical thought. While Taiwo the exiled African who encounters racism laments the racially motivated neglect of African philosophy by Western scholars, Makinde the Africa-based scholar bemoans the absence of robust growth and the neglect of African philosophy by Africans. There seems to be something ironic in the lamentations of Taiwo and Makinde when linked together by their common concern: while Taiwo looks towards the West with suspicion, Makinde looks towards the same West for help. Is it easy to reconcile the lamentations of these two eminent scholars? Yes. In making the reconciliation, I say that African philosophers have not done enough to earn African philosophy recognition throughout the world. If we can make the discipline attractive enough, the world will take note. For the world to take note, we ourselves must take note by realizing our precarious position in the world and work passionately, tirelessly, and with great honesty to make African philosophy a truly great tradition. The solution to the dilemma of African philosophy lies with us Africans. All that is required is that we think harder than we have ever done beyond the limit of ethno-philosophy and support our best brains.

Kwasi Wiredu, who has inspired many African philosophical thinkers with his emphasis on the need for the decolonization of African philosophy, is under no illusion that tribal philosophies will take the tradition anywhere. He calls for the direct interrogation of nature, the seeking of answers to questions such as, "What is truth, goodness, freedom, time, causality, justice? What is the origin of the universe, the meaning of life, the destiny of the human soul (whatever it is)? What are the principles of correct reasoning? What are the best ways of acquiring knowledge? ... we contemporary Africans have a duty to venture suggestions on these matters. In doing so, we will, of course, have to take due account of our heritage, as philosophers in other cultures routinely do" (Wiredu 1998).



Obviously, African thinkers have not yet taken up Wiredu's challenge. Wiredu demands for original thinking. It is true that many African thinkers in their great haste and zeal to massage the big ego of the tribe have eagerly and chaotically inquired into the problems raised by Wiredu as legitimate questions of African philosophy; yet they have gone about this business largely with the interest of the tribe at heart rather than the interest of the great tradition in the making. A reading of what these scholars have written about God, immortality, necessity, time, the person, etc, reveals a remarkable uniformity of underlying thoughts, which confirms my position that they add little or nothing to the intellectual achievements of the tribe. Instead, they merely illuminate tribal worldviews using Western philosophical categories. For example, what a Yoruba philosopher such as Gbadegesin (1991, 27ff) says about the divisibility of the concept of the person into physical and spiritual components is not radically different from what an Akan scholar such as Gyekye (1995, 83ff) says about the dualist and interactionist conception of the person. Indeed, Wiredu, the apostle of decolonization, realizes how deeply frivolous tribal philosophizing can demean our tradition; for he insists that 'decolonization' is only an initial preoccupation of the post-colonial reconstruction era, adding that "The time will come when there would be, for the most part, no pressing need for the kind of particularism discussed above here" (Wiredu 1998).

The time has come for the individual African thinker to leap over the hurdle of particularism. Ethno-philosophy as an achievement exhausted the ingenuity and power of the particularist interest or what Wiredu calls decolonization but which we regard as an appeal for originality. We must move up to meet the world. The African character of our thinking will not be lost once our philosophical imagination is original, since we will not appeal to Greece for inspiration. The foundation that is ethno-philosophy and the worldviews of the tribe are sufficient to fire our philosophical imagination as an inspiration for the century. African philosophers have not dared to think with the kind of radicality that alone can earn the respect of the West whose approbation we greatly desire since we lack an intellectual culture robust enough to provide such approbation. For four decades we were content equating African philosophy with ethno-philosophy, and this was a monumental error. Philosophers such as Wiredu (1980, 39) and Hountondji (1996) who saw with commendable acuity that ethno-philosophy could not be the

essence of African philosophy did not, unfortunately, provide an alternative rich and radical enough to earn the universal acclaim we crave.

In my considered opinion, in the African philosophical environment there are three types of thinkers, namely:

1. Scholars of Western philosophy.
2. Ethno-philosophers.
3. African philosophers.

I have presented my classification in an increasing order of eminence. The scholars of Western philosophy are the least eminent, being the least original, while the African philosophers are the most eminent, the most original, and the fewest. The scholars of Western philosophy are to be found in abundance in the philosophy departments of African universities teaching courses in Western philosophy, and relatively unperturbed by the questions that rage in African philosophy. The eminence of the ethno-philosophers over the scholars of Western philosophy stems from the fact that the former helped establish ethno-philosophy as the foundation of African philosophy. The African philosophers are the most accomplished because of the magnitude of their individual contributions to the development of African philosophy. Often these eminent thinkers double as scholars of Western philosophy and ethno-philosophy, as in the cases of Wiredu, Gyekye, Orika, and Gbadegesin. Every serious African thinker in the field of philosophy is understandably a scholar of Western philosophy. Not all African philosophical thinkers are ethno-philosophers. L.S. Senghor falls into the ethno-philosophical category, but cannot be allowed entry into the more eminent category of African philosophers. Yet this poet-politician, in my opinion, envisioned the most radical philosophical doctrine in the whole of African thought, one from which Innocent Asouzu indirectly benefitted and from which we emergent *consolationist* thinkers are directly benefitting, as we will soon show. Like Paulin J. Hountondji, Asouzu has refused to be an ethno-philosopher: he is a scholar of Western philosophy and a member of the elite category of African philosophers distinguished by their originality.

## **From L.S. Senghor to Innocent Asouzu: The Search for the Elusive African Synthesis**

The emergence of Innocent Asouzu in Nigeria, coming over five decades after Senghor's radical move towards the articulation of a majestic philosophical system with an authentic African inspiration, is something worth rejoicing about. Asouzu is, in my opinion, the first thinker to produce a Nigerian, and therefore African, philosophy. Although Igbo, his thoughts are not restricted to the worldviews of his Igbo people. Because his thoughts are universal, they reconcile the tribe not only with the nation, but also with humanity. While other Igbo philosophical scholars such as Njoku (2009) and Edeh (1999) overtly proclaim their Igboness, Asouzu has claimed his Igboness for Nigeria and the world. His monistic philosophy traces its inspiration to the essentially holistic worldview of Black Africa. This holism is the search of all isolated instances of reality – or what Asouzu (2004, 312) calls missing links – for unity in their complementarity.

Senghor tells us that negritude as an idea expresses a distinctly African way of life. Though distinct from Westernism, it does not have to fundamentally oppose Westernism because it is in its essence a vision of man, an African humanism. For Senghor negritude is animated by “intuitive reason, because this sentient reason ... expresses itself emotionally, through that self-surrender, that coalescence of subject and object, through myths, by which I mean the archetypal images of the collective soul, synchronized with those of the cosmos ... the sense of communion, the gift of myth-making, the gift of rhythm ... the essential elements of *Negritude*, which you will find indelibly stamped on all the works and activities of the black man” (quoted in Njoku 2002, 49). Senghor famously or infamously contrasted the analytical intelligence of the Western man with the emotional intelligence of the African man. While I agree that Senghor arrived at an exaggeration, I have, nevertheless, been able to pierce the superficiality of the Senghorian exaggeration to grasp the revolutionary character of the undeveloped thought of this most original thinker, the insight which must have dawned on John Sodipo (1975, 117) who rhapsodized over Senghor thus: “Whatever fault one may find with the articulation and content he gave to the conception [negritude] it is in my view to Leopold Senghor's eternal credit that he boldly even if poetically asserted the existence of a distinctly African conception of the universe

and of a mode of existence founded upon that conception.” In Senghor’s elevation of emotion to a prominent position, in celebrating what Senghor himself called the gift of mythmaking and the inclusive African communalism, the great poet was trying to explicate a universal philosophy founded on a genuine African inspiration.

Despite the Bergsonian and Sartrean influences noticeable in Senghor, he sought an epistemological instrument independent of the Western knowledge model. He desired a truly African model that would not bow the knee to Greece, but which would be so universally applicable as to achieve the complementarity Asouzu was later to unravel in *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy or complementary reflection. The optimistic philosophy of Senghor that lay hidden in the idea of negritude came to the fore in Asouzu (2004, 312ff; 2007a, 176ff; 2011, 100-106), who insisted on the *joy of being* (analogous to the gift of rhythm Senghor promoted) as the natural phenomenological result for the consciousness that totalizes itself in the increasing unification of diversity. Diversity breaks up into missing links, but the mind sees these isolated links as conducing to a more perfect whole, the advancing complement, in the convergence of being which yields joy for consciousness. This is the kernel of Asouzu’s complementary reflection. It is a radicalization of Senghor’s optimism, a further extension and universalization of the humanism implicit in negritude.

Asouzu’s achievement is his ability to give analytical coherence to the inspiration that came powerfully to Senghor. On the basis of his monistic system, Asouzu arrives at the following principles of *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy which once again underline the link between him and Senghor:

1. The principle of integration, which states that *anything that exists serves a missing link of reality*.
2. The principle of progressive transformation, which states that *all human actions are geared towards the joy of being*.

3. The imperative of *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy, which states that “*allow the limitations of being to be the cause of your joy*”.

4. The truth and authenticity criterion, which states that “*never elevate any world immanent missing link to an absolute instance*” (Asouzu 2011, 105).

Whereas Senghor tried to formulate a complementary philosophy with universal applicability, projecting a strong humanistic perspective, and sadly failed to escape the limitation of particularism, Asouzu succeeded in escaping the bounds of the African particular to arrive at a universal formulation. Both men were advancing an optimistic philosophy founded on the essentially optimistic African worldview. Nevertheless, while Senghor (1995, 121) remained enthralled by the black man’s uniqueness (even as an African humanism is being projected towards the world) and rhapsodized about the black man’s gift of rhythm and intuition, Asouzu (2011, 105 ff.) broadened this humanistic vision with his concept of missing links as ultimately conducing to human joy. The former kept hammering at his Africanity while the latter had ceased to be obsessed with Africa and had recognized himself as a true African philosopher (and therefore a true philosopher) – a black thinker who addresses the world as a human being. Asouzu came as a Kant preaching his prolegomena and telling us how we are to proceed with the business of philosophizing in a continuously globalizing world, which, therefore, must be characterized by reconciliation.

My own reflections have been driven by a passionate desire to ground African philosophical thinking in an authentic African rationalism which is, nevertheless, universally relevant (Agada 2010; 2011).<sup>2</sup> The *Ibuanyidanda* (complementarity as a phenomenon) of Asouzu was the tonic I needed to reconcile Africa to the world by showing that my uniquely African vision of the universe is in solidarity with the basic ideas of the Occident and Orient. I agree with Masolo (2010, 33-34) that the African thinker must throw off the yoke of intellectual dependence on the

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<sup>2</sup> The treatise *Existence and Consolation*, which is the culmination of my researches, is being prepared for publication.

Western intellect. Yet this does not mean that we should think with less intellectual rigour than Western philosophers. On examining books on the African philosophy shelves of any library fortunate enough to have them, one notices the preponderance of ethno-philosophical texts and almost entirely polemical works in the philosophy of culture. One will search in vain for any great metaphysical, logical, and epistemological work. Since we have opted for the easy way in the name of pursuing a uniquely African mode of thinking, the Western thinkers have conveniently ignored our tradition to the anger and grief of men such as Taiwo. In my opinion, African philosophy is different from Western and Oriental philosophies only in the sense of the divergence of the African experience of the world, not because African philosophy has a different subject matter. Black thinkers such as Cheikh Anta Diop (1991) and Innocent Onyewuenyi (1993) have, in fact, argued for the African origin of Greek philosophy, and, by implication, Western philosophy.

Asouzu radicalized Senghor. We too must radicalize Asouzu because he did not provide a rich metaphysical content to his optimistic philosophy, and over-indulged in dry polemic. The moment we realize that the emotional African Senghor presented to the world is actually the *melancholy man*, we will no longer be furious with that original thinker. The man whose philosophical history Senghor was trying to capture is the universal man. If he presented this universal man (the *melancholy man*) as an African, it was simply because he was not equal to the great task before him - the task of becoming a profound philosopher rather than a fine poet. Having failed in his bid to become an African philosopher, Senghor was content asserting wrongly that the *melancholy man* is black in colour. Senghor's contribution to epistemology, which, again, he did not explore, is the profound insight into the truth of the dependence of rationality on emotionality, the priority of emotion to reason, a discovery not completely unknown to such Western thinkers as Plotinus, Spinoza, Kant, Rousseau, Sartre, and even Hume who subordinated the intellect to the emotions. We will summarize consolation philosophy in the following section and show that not only can we radicalize Asouzu, but also that we can exorcize the ghost of Hegel and in the process provide the challenge to world philosophy which Taiwo has so eloquently urged on us. This will mean providing a constructive alternative programme to ethno-philosophy.

## Consolationism as the Radicalization of Senghor and Asouzu

My own philosophical orientation, consolationism, is a philosophy rooted in everyday affairs. I look around me and see all the indicators of a very wretched condition of human existence. Man has to contend with moral evil (for example, wars, mass murders, corrupt practices, and violent religious fundamentalism) and physical evil (for example, the impact of devastating earthquakes and hurricanes on human life). Consideration of this bleak state of affairs makes me ask whether there is any meaning to human existence, and whether the universe itself has a purpose. Even as I ponder this question, it strikes me that neither science nor religion nor philosophy has found any compelling solution to the problem of the origin of the physical universe and of life. Yet this bleak picture is just one aspect of a Janus-faced reality. Just as there is terror in the world, so also is there beauty. A state of peace endures side by side with the state of conflict. Good constantly seeks to neutralize evil. I therefore consider consolation philosophy to be a fatalistic philosophy because it seeks to reconcile the pessimistic view of the universe with the optimistic view given the stark reality of terror and beauty in the world. Consolationism is a systematic philosophy that seeks answers to the following two basic questions:

- (1) Is human life futile?
- (2) Is the universe pointless?

The master doctrine I found, the key to answering the questions posed above, is the doctrine of *mood*. I seek to formulate a coherent African metaphysical system with implications for epistemology, ethics, the philosophy of science, applied philosophy, and comparative philosophy. I seek to give world philosophy a compelling African synthesis that does not look to Greece for inspiration. In consolationism I seek a synthesis that provides solutions to the great questions of philosophy from a non-Western perspective, while remaining firmly rationalistic and keeping in touch with the 21st century man, the *melancholy man*.

Consolationism substitutes determinism with fatalism, and conceives the latter as a higher necessity than the former. This is so because of the failure of determinism to account for the universe as uniformly structured and perfectly intelligible. The reality of evil in the world strongly suggests that the world is not a perfect expression. Effects in the world cannot be traced with certainty to a spontaneous beginning in the causal series. The Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe and the creation theory of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, for example, cannot be practically demonstrated: these theories are speculative.

Furthermore, if the universe cannot be accounted for with certainty and if what we know about it points to its imperfection, then this universe must exist fatalistically, in the sense of being an inevitability - a necessity - that characterizes itself as yearning. I hypothesize that it is only by positing the universe as *mood* and the development of *mood* that we can show that existence is an imperfect expression in which beauty evolves out of terror, a higher state of completeness out of a lower state. I call this process the dialectic of *mood*. *Mood* is the primordial intelligence which I identify with God in His phase of impersonality. Terror and beauty, subsisting at the cosmic level, are apprehended by man in his sadness and joy. Sadness and joy are perceived by the human intellect as pessimism and optimism. Thus consolationism is an idealistic system, since it places a primitive mind at the foundation of the universe.

Consolation philosophy traces its inspiration from the African community that endures, through the African light shed by the academic ethno-philosophers and the vision of Senghor, to the rationalism of Asouzu. Nyerere (1968, 11 ff.) has shown us that the traditional African community operates a system of communalism or familyhood, an optimistic perspective boding well for humanity. The thoughts of ethno-philosophers such as Gbadegesin (1991, 27ff) and Gyekye (1995, 83ff) on the mind-body problem helped me put the question of the relation between reason and emotion in sharper focus. Senghor's assertion that the African has a unique intuitive way of seeing the world set me on the path to determining the universalizability of his theory of knowledge. From Asouzu I borrowed the method of complementary reflection which enjoins African researchers not to be unduly worried by the influence of Western thought on



their researches because the human mind is uniform and seeks to uncover one reality. My break with Western philosophy is my attempt to substitute the philosophy of being with the philosophy of *mood*.

The assertion of the essential *moodiness* (that is, the yearning essence of existence, the totality of being) of reality may leave me open to the accusation of idealism. Mercifully, this will not be the accusation that I am a German idealist. My idealism, which, paradoxically, destroys and resurrects universal idealism, is an African idealism. It destroys universal idealism by erecting a primary doctrine of pessimism as accounting for the foundation of existence. Here I am different from Asouzu, who never explores the phenomenon of metaphysical nihilism and appears to overlook the problem of evil like the monists and absolute idealists of Western philosophy. Where Asouzu talks about the joy of being as an intellectual and emotional state realizable when missing links converge to reveal a more perfect whole, I talk of cosmic terror as the foundation of being and interpret the joy of being as the supreme recognition of the eternal sway of fatalism and ethical resignation to this same fatalism. In elevating the place of sadness in human consciousness and in constructing a pessimistic metaphysics that accommodates nihilism, consolation philosophy destroys idealism. In elevating the position of joy in human consciousness and in building an optimistic metaphysics on the doctrine of fatalism and, in the process, showing that nihilism is an exaggeration misunderstood by anarchists, consolation philosophy resurrects idealism.

Consolation philosophy is the doctrine of *mood* - the system of thought animated by the emotion of life. A cursory examination of the process of perception indicates the burden of the mind as its emotion. The emotional burden of the mind has been denied by the class of thinkers called logicians who, even as they are denying it, have to contend with cynicism and scepticism - the first symptoms of the emotional burden of the intellect. All disciplines are substantially the creations of the human intellect, but because this intellect is itself an emotion, its processes terminate ultimately in conscious or unconscious surrender to nihilism in its many forms. The logic of life is the emotionality of existence and the logic of the mind is the detachment of the

intellect, which logicians isolate from the other vaster logic. I insist that this same intellect is nothing more than a refined emotion. The intellect is understood either as the faculty of reason or the capacity for reason, for the logical and coherent structuring of our beliefs. The intellect, then, indicates rationality; but where is this reason coming from?

The error in much of Western philosophy is the radical separation of emotion from reason. Rationality has two basic dimensions, the ethical and the logical. A thing or proposition is said to be rational if and only if it satisfies a basic human demand that this thing or proposition should be good or satisfy the condition that warrants its being approved of. For instance, an act of apparently unprovoked murder is considered irrational not because we are convinced that no reason can be found for the act but, fundamentally, because the act fails to meet the demand of goodness. To demand that an act satisfy the condition of goodness is to subscribe to a moral imperative. This morality is fundamentally a demand of human emotion - the logic of life. I think that it is this point that Senghor was trying to demonstrate with his famous notion of black emotionality and white rationality. Even in the Western tradition, no less a philosopher than David Hume (1978, 415) has insisted that reason is subservient to passion. How then can the intellect mock the emotive faculty? Why must science denigrate poetry? Why must we think that one philosophy can be emotional or romantic (e.g. the philosophy of Unamuno or Senghor or even Spinoza) while another is logical or unsentimental (e.g. the philosophy of Descartes or that of Russell)?

If the logic of the intellect has its origin in the primal logic of existence, precisely in emotion, then the intellect can never escape its emotional origin which is also its destiny. The entire meaning of man's life is to be found in his joy and sadness. These primal emotions constitute yearning, which in its turn is a transcendental appeal to something higher than man - a Being that can help man realize happiness, the goal of all yearning. This Being is God. It does not matter whether He is the invention of man or whether He exists objectively. Just as one instinctively knows one exists, so does one involuntarily believe that God exists as a Being powerful enough to grant one the enduring happiness which the emotion of joy indicates but cannot realize, as

human joy is never permanent. Emotion is a demand that God should exist as the Supreme Being. The intellect can either endorse this demand as intelligible or cast a slur on it as unintelligible. In plainer words, the intellect can never reject the idea of God (which is at once concept and emotion). This is due to the fact that the rejection of this idea already entails its acceptance as we will soon see. The choice of believing is the emotional decision of the intellect. Emotion may be stronger at everyday levels of eating, drinking, mating, and social interaction, but it is not absent at higher levels of abstraction. Let us take the example of the philosopher or scientist who thinks that the logic of the intellect is able to detach itself from the logic of life in rigorous reasoning and analysis.

René Descartes and Bertrand Russell were both philosophers and mathematicians, but they arrived at different conceptions of God through rigorous thinking. While Descartes (1952, 213-231) concluded that there is a God, Russell (in Durant 1926, 519-520) dismissed religion as mysticism, put his faith in science, and thought it is more likely that there is no God. So we have broadly identified two doctrines, theism or deism and atheism. Agnosticism is either theism or atheism; so we must ignore it. Agnosticism is theism if the agnostic believes in God but asserts that He is beyond human perception; it is atheism if the agnostic says that the utter transcendence of God implies the superfluity of the very concept of God.

As the positive affirmation of faith in the logic of existence, theism is a display of emotion. As positive affirmation it is inspired by joy. The first demand of emotion, the primal energy of that which yearns, is the demand that God should exist. Atheists correctly suspect that theism is a kind of emotional outburst, an unreasoning and therefore foolish emotion. But so is atheism an emotion but not a foolish emotion, in the same way that theism is not a foolish emotion. When the atheist accuses the theist of inventing a god who is silent and invisible in order not to be shamed by the eternal postponement of the appearance of his god, he does not gloat for too long. His polemical triumph is terminated abruptly because the theist responds that in inventing his god he desires his invention, and desires it so earnestly from the top to the bottom of his being, so completely, that a possibility emerges which is asserted as a reality, the denial of which will

amount to the denial of a concrete life that exists beyond doubt. This of course is the triumph of probability, upon which science itself depends. As soon as we begin to ask the questions “What is matter?” and “Why is there something?” the coherence of science dissolves and this same science is revealed as a body of beliefs - a dogma that seizes certainty for itself out of probability. Atheism is an emotion because it is the withdrawal of the affirmation of the theist, the refusal to affirm faith in the logic of life which, I say, insists on the demand that God should exist. The God-concept is already a given in consciousness. It only remains for this concept to be affirmed or denied. Its denial takes its first premise from the positive affirmation of the theist.

First Fundamental

Derivative

God exists.

No, He does not exist.

The first fundamental belongs to the theist. The derivative is the atheist's. So the atheist, unfortunately, comes last. Before the atheist makes his denial, his supreme act of nihilist emotionalism, he goes through the three stages of cynicism, scepticism, and despair. He is cynical because he thinks. He is sceptical because he doubts. He despairs because he is dissatisfied with the *absence* he perceives instead of the *presence* of the theist. The proclamation of the non-existence of God brings satisfaction in the aftermath of the first spontaneous dissatisfaction. Both dissatisfaction and satisfaction are emotions. The satisfaction comes as the intellect's vindication of its cynicism. The dissatisfaction is due to the collapse of an illusion. Thus despair corrupts the intellect by making it cynical and sceptical. The cynicism and scepticism of the intellect do not constitute a rebellion against the God-concept *per se*, but rather indicate the intellect's recognition of the fundamental tragedy of existence. This tragedy reveals emotion in its creative sway (the *mythopoeic* element of existence). The unending struggle of the intellect with despair underlines its emotionality. The height of this despair is atheism.

It is important to show that the intellect itself is emotional to pre-empt detractors who may want to dismiss consolationism as a philosophy of emotion or as mere intellectual romanticism.

Consolation philosophy is a continuation of the African synthesis discovered by Senghor and advanced by Asouzu. It propagates the doctrine of *mood* as the key to the unravelling of the notion of fatalism. It is a doctrine of *mood* in the recognition of the fact that emotion animates thought. Emotion is the given logic of life which baffles the intellect in the despair of the intellect, for which fatalism is not enough. Yet surrender it must to fatalism. If existence has no reason to be what it is beyond the incontrovertible fact that it *is*, then this existence is a *fatality*. Yet it cannot be that existence is superfluous because it is characterized by yearning. As characterized by yearning, the meaning of existence is consolation. At the level of man's existence, consolation resolves itself as joy and sadness meditated upon by human consciousness as optimism and pessimism. The sadness is basic, but the joy is real for that which yearns. The sadness is fundamental since the cosmic goal is consolation rather than perfection. The pessimism is basic, but the optimism constantly denies nihilism because of what Asouzu calls the future reference, the indication of the possibility of a realizable progress, even as it is necessarily indicated, within a totality that is yearning. Asouzu (2011, 105) condenses this insight into the imperative of complementary reflection: *Allow the limitations of being to be the cause of your joy*.

What content, synthetic or analytic, does Asouzu give to the principle above? "..., *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy seeks to show how the essential and accidental, how being and its various modes of expression form an integrated complementary whole," writes Asouzu by way of promise. "Here, we wish to show how being becomes manifest as the authentic mutual joyous experience that unifies all missing links" (Asouzu 2011, 106). Asouzu is still writing actively. He has rendered great service to African philosophy, from which we cannot but benefit.

The consolationist desires to find in philosophical fatalism the grounds of the universe's sufficiency. The question arises: "Can the doctrine of *mood* lead us to a conception of fatalism which in turn yields a notion of sufficiency that entails the necessity of the inevitable and therefore the compulsory existence of the universe?" Again this: "Can fatalism entail determinism?" How can we argue that sufficient conditions are prior to necessary conditions,

that what suffices produces what is necessary? Granted, the point I am trying to make is complex, as I seek to render more intelligible the matter of infinite regress raised by the supposition that determinism can give us a satisfactory explanation of the origin of the universe. The rule of causality says every event has a cause. This is necessity. But is it really true that for every effect there must be a cause? Let us assume that the phenomena of the world can be traced to God as First Cause. How do we account for God's existence? Thus we see that the chance element previously discarded rears its head just when we think it has been permanently shut out. Here tychism (the notion that chance plays an important role in the evolution of the universe) threatens theological determinism. Yet dignifying chance by conferring creativity on it makes it an intelligent force - a directional cosmic impulse. The battle line is therefore drawn between determinism and indeterminism, with the one losing its character now and taking the form of the other again.

My way out of this difficulty, the infinite causal regress, is to subordinate determinism to the notion of fatalism from the consolationist perspective. Fatalism then becomes the highest *necessity*, as that which throws up sufficiency. For something to exist it must meet the conditions of sufficiency. That which is must be sufficient, either in itself or in something which is sufficient in itself. The necessity of a thing's existence can be abstracted from its sufficiency. We cannot generalize about a set of instances if we do not isolate particular instances. In causation this isolation of particular instances gives priority to sufficiency. For example, if standing in the hot sun for a long period causes headache and having malaria fever also causes headache, we have two causes producing the same effect and standing as conditions. Both conditions are sufficient rather than necessary if considered together. It is enough to have malaria to get a headache, yet standing in the sun also gives one a headache. However, when we isolate these instances and critically analyse them in their isolation the conditions previously seen as sufficient become necessary. That is to say, sufficiency passes into necessity.

Let us reconsider the example of headache caused by malaria. Moving from plurality to singularity, one gets a headache if and only if one has malaria. Applied to the puzzle of

existence, this point we have made indicates that logical certainty is extracted from existential probability. The universe must necessarily exist only because it is sufficient unto itself. Logic demands certainty (rigid determinism), but existence, which is expressed in plurality, gives us probability. Probability encompasses the inevitability of events as the limited mind of man grasps them. Existence does not give us a perfect universe structured with such precision that events can be traced with certainty through a chain of causation to a First Cause, but rather a universe expressed imperfectly, whose imperfection nevertheless indicates the possibility of progress. That which is probable is an imperfection that yet points towards progress by reason of its existing essentially as consolation, fatalistically, having no reason for existing accessible to the human mind beyond the realization on the part of man that it yearns and is in motion. Existence indeed is an absolute unity, but this absolutism is perceived by the human intellect as pluralism. The entailment of necessity by sufficiency supplies the only genuine reason for the validity of dialectic.

As the ground of all actualities and possibilities, fatalism provides the sufficient condition for the existence of the universe. It accounts for the puzzle of necessity as an inevitability rooted in a yearning essence. Thus the universe, existence itself, is a *fatality*, and the mood of man mirrors an objective external state with which it is intimate. The clarification of this consolationist dialectic is the supreme struggle of consolation philosophy. While it is true that I have taken notice of the merits and demerits of the dominant Western philosophical traditions (in particular, rationalism, phenomenology, existentialism, and philosophical analysis), I must insist that my system is neither a development from Western existentialism nor a product of philosophical analysis.

My system, consolationism, is African philosophy. Existentialism takes full account of man's concrete situation, which is interesting, but fails to account for the fatality of the universe, thus preparing the way for the despair-laden postmodernist tradition. The almost entirely bleak vision of existentialism and postmodernism is contrary to the optimistic African spirit which Senghor hinted at ahead of Asouzu's declaration. On its part, the analytical tradition dominant in England

and America relies too much on the power of language, and seeks unjustly to subordinate philosophy to science as if sounding 'scientific' will ever make the philosopher a scientist of notable scientific achievements. Linguistic analysis with some esoteric mathematical symbols thrown in here and there cannot achieve the task of consolation philosophy. If truly language is contemporaneous with thought (for it cannot be prior to thought), it is because the former is a development of primal thought: the *mood* of eternity. Language is subordinate to this *mood*. Thought itself is an evolutionary fragment of *mood*. Language cannot create a pain. Thought may express this pain, but *mood* is this pain itself. Consequently, while taking note of the Anglo-American analytical tradition's emphasis on clarity, consolation philosophy is not particularly enamoured by it.

### Conclusion

By now African philosophy ought to have contributed immensely to the enlightenment of the broader African society. This enlightenment has not happened because the continent has not produced original and exciting philosophers capable of capturing the intellectual imagination of the educated section of the broader society. Newspaper columnists in Nigeria love quoting the Western existentialist philosophers since they cannot quote the unquotable lines of the tribal philosophers of Africa. The failure to produce great thinkers has left African intellectual life without an intellectual compass. Consequently, the continent wallows in underdevelopment, mocked, despised, and pitied by the rest of the world. A philosophy is needed now that will leap off the shelves of university libraries and engage the larger society in the most lucid, yet profound discourse.

If it is true, as I have endeavoured to show, that African philosophers have not adequately justified the existence of African philosophy, must we still blame Western intellectual racism and dishonesty for our intellectual diffidence, our lack of intellectual curiosity? When Wiredu (1998) sent out his famous call for decolonization, he was demanding originality and audacity from African thinkers. If we believe we cannot produce our own Spinoza, Russell, Plotinus, etc, we are still cowering in the shadow of intellectual colonialism. If this inferiority complex will deny



us our 21st century triumph, then Wiredu, in crying out for decolonization, has laboured in vain. Can African philosophers be intellectually honest and curious enough to attempt to provide the solution to the puzzle of a tradition that, having been born as ethno-philosophy, has refused to grow robustly? We must provide a positive answer to this question by looking beyond ethno-philosophy and embracing the era of radical individual thinking.

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