

EUROCENTRIC AND AFROCENTRIC VIEWS ON THE ORIGIN OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Eurocentrism is a result of the time when Europe was the predominant power on the planet. Eurocentrism portrays a state of mind which certifies Europe as the cradle of world human advancement. Africa had not been the same since colonial period, which is mostly as a result to Eurocentric ideas. One of the delayed consequences of colonialism is that it tends to over toss cultural values and philosophy of the province and supplant it with the colonials' culture and philosophy. Many Afrocentric scholars believe Eurocentric ideas undermine African's rich scholarly and philosophy legacy to humankind. This had brought about pressure between the two schools of contemplation. Philosophy aims to be objectivity but comes into question when we our cultural background and biases begins to play strongly into our perception and thinking. This paper tends to expose the lacunas in Eurocentric and Afrocentric ideas on origin of Philosophy. This paper faults both school of thought assertions that Philosophy originates from its culture.

Keywords: Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism, Africa, Philosophy, History.

1. INTRODUCTION

Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism are two terms that are used to refer to Africa and European schools of thought respectively. These schools of thought have some similarities, also difference in ideology and thinking which is rooted in their culture. Many academicians have argued that if not for Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism would never have existed, and in the same vain most Afrocentric scholars have also argued in favour of the Afrocentric School, noting that Afrocentrism begot Eurocentrism. These two schools of thought have two different perspectives, which are interesting. Afrocentricism is trying to place emphasises on the African thing and give Africa its right in the academic enterprise and history as it aim to shift from the European ideology to an African ideology (Winters 1992). Eurocentricism on the other hand is trying to place emphasis on western world-view and also tries to centralize their views. This paper tends to look at both school of thought on their philosophy, specifically on the debate on the origin of Philosophy.

2. EUROCENTRISM

Eurocentrism was coined and first used by Samir Amin in 1988 (Amin 1988). Eurocentricism is said to be an attempt of the Europeans to dominate the world. In another version eurocentrism is said to be a movement which places Europe

as the cradle of world civilization against other regions (Areji, 2005. 55). Many African scholars, sees Eurocentrism as "not only denial but appropriation of African's rich intellectual and scientific legacy to mankind" (Nwala, 1993. 55). This literally means that Eurocentrism sees her thinking and philosophy superior to all groups. It is documented that Eurocentric world view spring out with Christopher Columbus, an explorer, colonizer and navigator who left Europe to seek new worlds, his voyages reaching Americas, lead to a period of colonization and conquest which lasted for several centuries. Some authors noted that European countries colonized nations because they assumed that they were "better" countries (Lewis, 1998). They introduced European ideology and culture to what they considered to be primitive colonies. Eurocentrism was the idea behind European countries to defend slavery, conquest, genocide, and other forms of exploitation. Many Afrocentric scholars believed that with false philosophies and scientific knowledge, they dominated nations, restructured societies, in other to give a universal history to fulfil the demands of human progress. Also with the advancement of technological breakthrough they began to see themselves as superpowers. Eurocentric intellectuals when they can in contact with Africans belittled Africans and felt Africa was uncivilized. For instance, Trevor-Roper had declared that: "...perhaps in the future there will be an African history to teach. But at the present there is none...; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness... and darkness is not a subject of history" (Trevor-Roper, 1964. 9). Though this is not necessarily true as Africans have existed long before the colonial rule, Africans had a long history of fishing in Nile

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and Niger Rivers before they were discovered by the Europeans. David Hume also continued this harsh critic in this damning stance:

“I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of neither that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures among them, no arts, no sciences. ...Not to mention our colonies, these Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people, without education; will start up amongst us and distinguish themselves in any profession. In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly” (Hume, 1969. 208)

This negative thinking spur up Europeans to make Africans see the world from European lens in all spheres of academic, political, scientific, religions aspect etc. This mentality even affected African intellectuals as they slowly began to reject and deny their own cultural and intellectual achievements. Nwala explains this: ‘It was African scholars who were affected by Eurocentric education that denied the existence of African philosophy during the “Great Debate” of the seventies and eighties’ (Nwala, 1992. 5). There is no hesitation that this criticism has been very brutal, it is in the light of this kind of argument that some African scholars responded to, and counter such argument.

3.AFROCENTRICISM

African scholarly rejoinder to Eurocentric worldview is said to be Afrocentric worldview. Afrocentricity is said to be an idea that African group ought to reassert a new way of looking at information from “a black perspective” (Chinweizu 2010). Afrocentrism is said to have been predisposed by several earlier Black Nationalist activities, including Ethiopianism and Pan-Africanism. The second became leading figure in the United States with the manifestation of the Jamaican campaigner Marcus Garvey, who promoted the notion and called for a detach African state for black Americans, W.E.B. Du Bois also, who help to launch National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1909 (Ogbar, 2005). Onyewuenyi explains vividly the Afrocentric standpoint:

“The Afrocentric movement is a series of activities by concerned African and African-American scholars, educators and directed towards achieving the particular end of ensuring that the African heritage and culture, its history and contribution to world civilization and scholarship are reflected in the curricula on every level of academic instruction.....Advocates of Afrocentrism demand a reconstruction and rewriting of the whole panorama of human history in its account of the origin of mankind, the origin

of philosophy, science, medicine, agriculture architecture etc (Onyewuenyi, 1993. .39-40).

Reacting to Eurocentric view, Afigbo, in his highly structured dissertation on Colonial historiography, opined that:

“The use of Hamitic, or white, supremacy as the explanation for the transition of African society from savagery through barbarism to the threshold of civilization was the result of Europe’s strong commitment, at the time, to the factor of race as the single most important, if not indeed the only important factor in historical development... First, even in the heart of the land of the Negroes, there existed societal conditions which clearly showed that the Negro had left the stage of savagery and in some cases were about to break out of barbarism into civilization...” (Afigbo, 1977: 47).

These scholars delved into the mission of debunking Western Eurocentric thinking, by attempting a renaissance of the African past in a suitable image. With the above Europe bias of African history, there became an exigent need for African Historians, in particular in the Late 1950s and early 1960s, to present a justification of an Existing ‘African History’ from a true African standpoint (Afro-centric point of view). Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama were noted to be the front runner of Afrocentricism. They saw Afrocentricism as an endeavour at answering all economic, political, cultural and social questions associated to African people from a centered position. To sum up, Afrocentricity tries to make obvious the superiority and authenticity of long-conventional African civilization as well as the African birth place of humanity and her development of which the European civilization has taken to advanced stage without recurs to acknowledge.

Eurocentricism and Afrocentricism on the Meaning of Philosophy

Unlike western Philosophy which is said to have begun with Thales of Miletus when he began to “wonder” Socrates and Aristotle agreed on. Systematic African Philosophy is said to have stated out of frustration and not with wonder (Anyawnu 1981:184-85). This frustration was as a consequence of historical proceedings such as slavery, colonialism and racism that generated aggravation from European philosophy and scholars. This in due course led to irritated questions, then responses and reactions out of which African philosophy surfaced.

The meaning of philosophy has been one of the major problems in Philosophy as there is little harmony as to what it is. Rather, what many see to be the case is what the descriptions of philosophy are: that is, what it entails which always provide directions for our definition. The word “Philosophy” itself was coined from Greek word “philo” and “sofia” which means love of wisdom; which has been adopted by African scholars, and many Africa philosophers still bears the title philosophers. It is said that Pythagoras a western Philosopher was the first to use the word Philosopher, when he liken philosophers to spectators. Systematically, African Philosophy didn’t start with the question what philosophy is? But relatively it was concern with what is African Philosophy? This did not negate the fact that African have been doing Philosophy before this time, but during the

ancient period, Philosophy in Africa was done through oral traditions, which have been dismissed by the European counterpart as mere myth. Before systematic philosophy began in Africa, it is been said that African ancient origin of philosophy is the Egyptian word “sbo” which means “love of wisdom” (Nwala 1997). Philosophy has been said to have existed in Africa many years before Greek philosophy began. It is also noted that the first known African philosopher is Imhotep. He was an Egyptian who lived 2000 years prior to the rise of Greek philosophy around six (6) century B.C (Nwala 1997). Against western believe that Philosophy stated with Thales of Miletus in the early 6th century BC. In the aspect of African philosophy, Sogolo, opines that “the controversy over what constitutes an African philosophy tends to dominate sometimes so much that it forms almost the entire content of the course”(Sogolo, 1990. 39). Today numerous scholars have argued that philosophy as a discipline that came from the Greeks; this contention has been vehemently debated.

Afrocentricism and Eurocentricism on the Origin of Philosophy

Western Philosophy have been said to be systematized in nature, this implies that it has been characterized by epochs. One epoch leading to another, characterized by, unique trending arguments which philosophers engaged in. The early western philosophers have been credited with their originality and boldness to transcend beyond mere myth to philosophical reflection, with the likes of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes been said to be the first three western philosophers. Some African philosophers have dispute this claim, noting that philosophy had started in African early before Greece era and that many of western early on philosophical reflection have existed in Africa deliberation. The earliest African philosopher and physician of antiquity of any fame was the black Egyptian imhotep who lived about 2980 BC during the third dynasty (Mikic 2008) long before Thales was born or anything was heard of Hippocrates a Greek doctor, now called the father of medicine. In fact Nwala did accuse some western philosophers for intellectual theft. The conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great made it possible for the Royal library at Alexandria to be apprehended and looted (Nwala 1997). This fraud is said to have been perpetuated and intellectually supported by Andronicus of Rhodes, and Eudemus who were pupils and propagandists for Aristotle. This dubious knowledge credited Aristotle with stupendous number of books, histories, sciences, which reason will tell us that no man can accomplish that within single life duration. Many of African knowledge has always been in oral tradition against European culture that had theirs documented and African oral tradition was not considered ‘history’ but myths (Afigbo, 1977. 94 - 95). This was also inflated into philosophy where many European Philosophers had opined that “Africans are outside the mainstream of the world philosophical development” (Areji, op cit, p. 55). Many highly respected African scholars have claimed that Greek philosophy originated from Egypt. They have lots of evidence to endorse their claim. For instance, evaluation G. M. James *The Stolen Legacy*, the very first within title page reads, “The Greeks were not the authors of Greek philosophy, but the people of North Africa, commonly called the Egyptians” (George, 1988. 1). Richard

Wright also barbed this out in the preface to his *Introduction to African philosophy* that;

“Because of latent prejudices and misconceptions, most non-Africans find it difficult to consider the possibility that Africans could have anything to contribute to philosophical understanding. (African) ...thinkers are so enamoured with the western philosophical tradition that their intellectual worlds would be crushed if it were ever discovered that philosophy did not spring into existence in 600 BC with Thales”(Wright, 1979. XiV).

With James declaration that Thales, his contemporaries and succeeding Greek philosophers all got their philosophical knowledge from Egypt, the much feared devastating blow had landed. The regrettable thing is that this exposure is that it was coming from a western tutored. The historical and valid account of James in the *Stolen Legacy* is an unsullied verification of who originated philosophy. What James did expose was the western slander that western civilization is the dependent creation of western genius. This makes history a story agreed upon by men: A single story. He emphatically opined that: The phrase Greek philosophy, to commence with is a misnomer, for there is no such philosophy in reality (George, 1988.1). He went further on to establish that the supposed Greek philosophers, from Thales to Aristotle who claim uniqueness to their enormous acquaintance actually studied in the Egyptian mystery schools at the feet of the Egyptian priests. This can explain why in the narration of Western philosophy there is no clear-cut explanation of where they studied, place of birth resultant in the information that their contemporaries did not know about them. Hegel had assumed Africa is no past part of the world; it has no progress or expansion to display. Africa is consequently the “unhistorical, undeveloped spirit” (Purtschert, 2010). Another way to challenge civilization and authorship of the Greeks is fact from carbon dating. The evidence is believed to be obvious from radio-carbon dating that African civilization is the earliest civilization. As Cheikh Anta Diop had opined “*Ethiopia is in point of fact the oldest state in the world*” (Diop, 1978. 4). From whence does the assertion of the west arrive which holds that civilization and philosophy startef in Greece? Cheikh Anta Diop had asserted that Africans are able to trace their origins devoid of considerable breaks in connection. Onyewuanyi in his book *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy* had explained the evidence of the African foundation of Greek philosophy. He strengthens G. M. James and Diops revelations. Hegel had one point even contradicted himself when he claimed that Africa is thus unhistorical, undeveloped spirit. Hegel latter avers that;

“Europe received the substantial beginnings of their religion; culture, their common bond of fellowship more or less from Asia, Syria and Egypt, but they (Europe) have so greatly obliterated the foreign nature of this origin, and it is so much changed, worked upon, turned around and altogether made so different, that what they as we, seek, prize, know, love in it is essentially their own” (Uduigwomen, 1995)

To have acknowledged to have gained something from Egypt is sufficient support to affirm Egyptian, antecedence to Greece in terms of intellectual brilliance. The Holy bible

concur that Moses learned in the arts and mysteries of the Egyptians. This account was many years before Greece civilization. Egyptian intelligence cannot be wisdom if it wasn't philosophical.

This paper submits that it is wrong to claim that a group of person don't have a philosophy; it is height of intellectual pride. Through Eurocentric thinking was wrong, on the other hand Afrocentric thinking also is wrong because it seems to reverse accusation. The same criticism against Eurocentric idea is the same with Afrocentric. The kind of Philosophy is what has lead to unhealthy competition, racism and inferiority-superiority comprehensive. Aristotle had opined that "Humans are rational animals" (Gregoric 2007). This implies that we are all capable of reasoning and philosophy, notwithstanding continent, country or culture. The supremacy contest had lead to lot of unholy conception like negritude and Social Darwinism into the vocabulary of philosophy and need to be examine and accommodating.

4.CONCLUSION

If philosophy is a critical, rational venture, and philosophizing is been carried out by people and group who loves wisdom then everyone should be capable of doing philosophy. This is in agreement with Aristotle dictum which claims that 'man is a rational animal' which Kant also agreed with. The paper had expose a dark precursor which is posing a great difficulty in the way of an unadulterated inter-cultural dialogue between Afrocentric and the Eurocentric philosophers on Philosophy and Intellectual achievement in general. Against this odd, we are not sure if the west is ready to accept Africans as been equal, in terms of human and intellectual achievement and vice visa. It is a known fact that European philosophy can be said to be systematic in its arrangement, but that does not relegate others to the background, and that does not imply it supremacy. It is not hidden that Eurocentric had tried to place its idea at the centre, hereby showcasing their supremacy. Unfortunately, this distorted understanding still to a large extent, shape some western perception and understanding of Africa. Afrocentric Philosophers on the other hand have tried to get their fallen glory by accusing the Europeans of intellectual fraud and try to place her own philosophy at the centre. Even now, some African scholars are still pre-occupied with the debate within subjects as diverse as law, history, philosophy, religion, and political science. I agree with many other Philosopher positions that Afrocentricity has been blamed to be reversed Eurocentrism. Afrocentricism can be called "The philosophy of hijack" in a way that it tries to bring down Eurocentrism idea and put Afrocentricism at the top. I think it is wrong to begin to contest the starting point of philosophy, without taking into account other continents and culture. Both schools pose racism and there is need for tolerance and accommodation.

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