

**IN DÉFENSE OF CRITICAL  
ETHNOPHILOSOPHY: TOWARD A  
PRAGMATIC CONSTRUCTIVISM  
EN DEFENSA DE LA ETNOFILOSOFÍA  
CRÍTICA: HACIA UN  
CONSTRUCTIVISMO PRAGMÁTICO**

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*Abstract*

This paper deals with methodological Realism and constructivism in African philosophy and defends the idea of critical ethnophilosophy. The necessity to incorporate local values into a universal paradigm constantly challenges the claim of objective truth. Thus, some African philosophers began investigating the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of their cultural values and beliefs. Despite its unusual approach to philosophy, this project demonstrates the need to accommodate local contexts in the formation of knowledge. Globalization is the recognition of the increasing awareness of interdependence not just in the sense of a global fraternity but also in a global competition for scarce resources. This leads to the formulation of a vision of global philosophy that addresses the concerns of humanity but at the same time recognizes local contexts. It is important to note that African philosophers are convinced that a genuine philosophical problem arises in response to a certain social context. This tendency is justified by recurrent appeals to certain readings of Derrida, Marx, Althusser, and Wittgenstein. The contention that there is such thing as African philosophy is not just about recognizing local or Indigenous knowledge claims rather, it is the outgrowth of contemporary philosophy. But it is argued that the Défense of local contexts should not be at risk of adopting cultural values and ideas that are out of step with the rest of the world. This article uses a qualitative methodology by way of extensive discussion and analysis of philosophical documents.

*Keywords:* Culture, development, ethnophilosophy, globalization, Indigenous knowledge, objectivity, scientific realism, critical ethnophilosophy, rationality.

*Resumen*

Este artículo trata sobre el realismo metodológico y el constructivismo en la filosofía africana y defiende la idea de la etnofilosofía crítica. La necesidad de incorporar valores locales en un paradigma universal desafía constantemente la pretensión de verdad objetiva. Así, algunos filósofos africanos comenzaron a investigar los fundamentos ontológicos y epistemológicos de sus propios valores y creencias culturales. A pesar de su enfoque inusual de la filosofía, este proyecto demuestra la necesidad de adaptarse a los contextos locales en la formación del conocimiento. La globalización es el reconocimiento de la creciente conciencia de la interdependencia no solo en el sentido de una fraternidad global, sino también de una competencia global por recursos escasos. Esto conduce a la formulación de una visión de la filosofía global que aborda las preocupaciones de la humanidad, pero al mismo tiempo reconoce los contextos locales. Es importante señalar que los filósofos africanos están convencidos de que un problema filosófico genuino surge como respuesta a un determinado contexto social. Esta tendencia se justifica por apelaciones recurrentes a ciertas lecturas de Derrida, Marx, Althusser y Wittgenstein. La afirmación de que existe tal cosa como la filosofía africana no se trata solo de reconocer los reclamos de conocimiento local o indígena, sino que es el resultado de la filosofía contemporánea. Pero se argumenta que la defensa de los contextos locales no debería correr el riesgo de adoptar valores e ideas culturales que están fuera de sintonía con el resto del mundo. Este artículo utiliza una metodología cualitativa a través de una extensa discusión y análisis de documentos filosóficos.

*Palabras clave:* Cultura, desarrollo, etnofilosofía, globalización, conocimiento autóctono, objetividad, realismo científico, etnofilosofía crítica, racionalidad.

### *Introduction*

African philosophy is an attempt to understand African historical, political, social, and economic situations in the context of Western modernity. Hence, African philosophy is understood as a reaction to the spread of Western modernity in the form of colonization and conquest since 1492 and the struggle for liberation and independence from the underside of modernity by Africans (Gordon, 2000, pp.1-2). Philosophy in Africa is understood in terms of its benefits for social reform and transformation. It is important to note that African philosophers are convinced that a genuine philosophical problem arises in response to a certain social context (Gade, 2017, p. 9). The contention that there is such thing as African philosophy is not just about recognizing local or Indigenous knowledge claims rather, it is the outgrowth of contemporary philosophy. African philosophy is a discourse or body of knowledge that focuses on philosophical problems that pertain to the African predicament. It is triggered by the encounter of the Black man with the white man. So, there is a consciousness of one's own Blackness or Bantu identity in African philosophy (Gordon, 2000, p.11). African philosophy has a political mission but at the same time theoretical pursuits. The political mission is apparently clear given the colonial encounter but there is an interesting point to the politics of African philosophy, that is, the imperative to mould a discourse that speaks to the African context to empower Africans given the dehumanizing colonial experience. Commitments to this mission are apparent in the works of major African thinkers and philosophers such as Nkrumah (1970), Ngugi (1987), Hountondji (1983), Wiredu (1980), and Gyekye (1987). African philosophy is a critical reflection on the colonial encounter to decolonize the African mind from debilitating categories of the colonial discourse (Messay, 2004, p.1).

According to Pearce (1992), there are three distinct contentions for an African philosophical venture. The first contention is that philosophy is fundamentally a cultural activity. Thus, the proponents of this view argue that Indigenous or traditional African thought is the source of African philosophical problematics and expression. The second contention is imperative to examine the linguistic heritage of culture since language is a repertoire of philosophical thought. For the advocates of this view studying African languages reveals concepts and worldviews that are different from those of the West. The third contention underscores the uniqueness of African traditional or indigenous experience from its Western counterpart (Pearce, 1992, pp.441-442). Hence, these contentions bring to our attention three major social phenomena culture, language, and experience. This implies that African philosophy is an attempt to understand the African social reality from a holistic perspective by synthesizing the major features of social life. It follows that the purpose of this article is to defend the concept of critical ethnophilosophy. The article builds on the works of Hountondji and Wiredu to argue that the study of African or Black cultures and traditions must be a critical activity with a view to bringing about political modernization and development in Africa. This paper is based on the analysis and discussion of primary and secondary literature in the African philosophical discourse. By primary literature is meant the works of original thinkers such as Hountondji, Gyekye, and Wiredu. Commentaries and discussions are also used as secondary sources.

*Culture and Philosophy*

For Gyekye (1987, p. 27) the human intellect is formed by unconscious social and cultural encounters. From this, we can deduce that intellectual pursuits are deeply impeded in a social milieu. Thus, African philosophy is based on a distinctive African reality (Akiwowo, 1980, 1). The social origin of thought is also reiterated by Nkrumah in his work *Consciencism* (1970). Nkrumah argues that it is impossible to understand Western philosophy in isolation from the social context that gives rise to it. The core of his argument is philosophers are the mouthpieces of a culture (Nkrumah, 1970, p.53). Thus, Nkrumah accuses philosophers of their pretension to transcend a socio-cultural context in their philosophical utterances. Nkrumah's Marxist move is apparent given his emplacement of philosophical thought within a social condition (Nkrumah, 1970, p.30). He argues that philosophical systems can be driven by the social conditions that give rise to them (Nkrumah, 1970, p.38). Nkrumah believes that philosophy can be used to set the ideological terms of political practice. He clearly draws the line between the metaphysical roots of intellectual life and mundane daily existence. Nkrumah argues that an ideology is the reflection of an incumbent social context. Philosophy is an attempt to theoretically capture the context in question by way of elucidation and justification. Thus, Nkrumah argues, "philosophy is an instrument of ideology" (Nkrumah, 1970, p.56). He points out that ideology is the basis of the fraternal bond that forms the identity of a group (Nkrumah, 1970, p.57). Ideology like morality permeates social life without explicit manifestation of its impact. It is an engine that drives society towards a common goal with a view to maintaining a specific moral order (Durkeihm,1964, p.398). Ideology is a holistic perspective on human life and existence (Nkrumah, 1970, p.59). Nkrumah locates the source of African identity and

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consciousness in traditional African cultures which are not adulterated either by Christian or Islamic traditions. Thus, Nkrumah argues that the source of African philosophy is traditional African cultures excluding Islamic and Christian traditions in Africa. From this, it follows that Western philosophy is deeply rooted in Western culture and expresses Western ideological convictions. Given this contention, it is imperative to reconsider the significance of Western philosophy in the African context. Moreover, there is a need to be wary of Western philosophical discourse as it vindicated imperial and colonial domination of so-called primitive societies.

The revival of interest in African philosophy can be attributed to Tempel's ground-breaking discussion of a philosophy indigenous to Africa in his work *Bantu philosophy*. Hountondji describes the works of African philosophers who followed Temples' methodology as ethnology disguised as philosophy (Hountondji, 1983, p. 34). Ethnophilosophy is an ethnographic endeavor to exhume tribal values and beliefs of traditional African societies. Although ethnophilosophy aims at understanding local values and cultures, its inability to rationally justify these beliefs and values makes it philosophically unsatisfactory (Bodunrin, 1981, pp.172-173). The question that must be answered is whether philosophy can be defined in terms of its theoretical goals without reference to a cultural context. What role do social factors play in the development of a philosophical perspective?

Terms that determine the ecological origin of people or ideas alike such as Indigenous, local, native, alien, foreign, and the like are used to distinguish legitimate and illegitimate membership to a place when there are competing claims to membership (Masolo, 2003, p.22). Social scientists study the origin of material and



intellectual heritages of peoples to understand their origin and evolution. The increasing attention given to Indigenous values and beliefs about African philosophy is only a recent development. In traditional politics, an appeal to Indigenous and local values and beliefs is preferable to alien and foreign claims to truth. The post-colonial scenario in African philosophy is characterized by arguments for and against indigeneity (Masolo, 2003, p.22). The quest for Indigenous values and knowledge is part of the emancipatory discourse at the global level. The guiding theme in contemporary political discourses such as multiculturalism and identity politics is the promotion and protection of local values and beliefs against the growing influence of globalization and Westernization. That is why the right of Indigenous groups is considered as a parallel exercise in the fight against the hegemonic discourse for freedom and equality (Masolo, 2003, p.22).

Wiredu draws our attention to the relationship between rigorous scientific thought and philosophy but acknowledges the imperative to examine African traditional beliefs and values to subject them to a critical and rational reflection. Wiredu contends that philosophy is a critical inquiry into the intellectual foundations of culture (Wiredu, 1980, p.20). Thus, he recommends an empirical investigation of a culture to understand what it is or was (Wiredu, 1980, p.14) and then subjecting it to a critical examination to make it palatable to modern standards (Wiredu, 1980, p.41). On contrary, Gyekye is opposed to the idea of subjecting African cultures and traditions to a critical reflection rather he wants to render them more presentable and understandable to the contemporary audience (Gyekye1987, p.29). Because he believes that critique is inherent to traditional thought particularly when it comes to aesthetic judgments (Gyekye, 1987, p.49). Gyekye argues that the mark of philosophical discourse is the

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fundamental nature of its inquiry and the nature of its subject matter (1987, p.51). It follows that folk thoughts concerning fundamental questions of reality, existence, and the good life are properly philosophical. Gyekye underscores that philosophy is inherently a cultural activity, that is “it is part of the cultural tradition and experience of a people” (1987, p.43). Gyekye’s point of departure is the relationship between philosophy and culture (1987, p.25). He states that philosophy is a “conceptual response to basic human problems” which is deeply embedded in “cultural experience and tradition of a people” (1987, pp.39-43). Gyekye argues that unless we engage in an African conceptual scheme it is impossible to establish a respectable tradition of philosophy in Africa (1987, p.37). Thus, for Gyekye it is imperative to make “African experiences, thoughts and categories and cultural values” the basis of African philosophical engagement (1987, p.33). Notwithstanding, it is important to note that this methodological discourse is conterminous with the latest developments in Western philosophy. Hence, it is important to recognize the need to critically reflect on African experiences, thoughts, and categories as pointed out by Wiredu and Hountondji. Because the term African in African philosophy is meant to suggest the scope and subject of inquiry as opposed to a parochial theoretical venture on Africa.

The post-colonial period marks the dawn of independence and hope for most African nations. Gyekye says that postcoloniality paves the way for potential autonomous self-expression of the colonized peoples by way of overcoming the degrading “aspects of colonial mentality acquired through decades of coloniality” (Gyekye,1997, p.25). Nonetheless, post-coloniality by no means implies the complete rejection of “the entire corpus of the colonial heritage” (Gyekye,1997, p.25). There are some important features of the colonial heritage that the colonized should exploit for

their cultural and intellectual development (Gyekye,1997, p.25). Gyekye notes that cultural borrowing “has been a seminal factor in the growth and evolution of cultures throughout the history of mankind” (Gyekye,1997, p.25). Hence, this process of appropriating and owning the most important features of the colonial heritage is a voluntary process of choosing and selecting values, institutions, and instruments of an encountered culture (Gyekye,1997, p. 26). African leaders and intellectuals have tried to produce an African version of Western values and institutions through the notions of African personality, African socialism, and others (Gyekye,1997, p.26). Gyekye notes that philosophy is “a conceptual response to human problems at different epochs” (Gyekye,1997, p. 26). Thus, critical thinking about the cultural and historical problems of Africa helps in the emergence of authentic African philosophy (Gyekye,1997, p. 26). The lack of scientific and technological advancement in colonial and postcolonial Africa can be attributed to “incomprehensible inattention to the search for scientific principles by the traditional technologists” (Gyekye,1997, p.26). The fact that traditional African societies are highly religious, and spiritual has been asserted by many anthropologists (Gyekye,1997, p. 26).

John Mbiti declares, “Africans are notoriously religious” in the sense that each African community has a codified set of rules and regulations for religious belief and practice (Mbiti, 1970, p.1). Mbiti says that religion permeates all aspects of life in traditional African societies (Mbiti, 1970, p.1). He says that atheism is an unthinkable category in traditional African life (Mbiti, 1970, p.38). There is intense and thorough religious immersion in traditional African life that “all life was religious.” (Busia, 1997, pp.1,7). Parrinder described Africans as “incurably religious people.” (Parrinder, 1962, p.9). Nonetheless, Gyekye notes that regardless of the highly religious nature of

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traditional African life, Africans are empirically minded to the extent that their knowledge of God is susceptible to have been derived empirically without the aid of revealed religion (Gyekye,1997, p.27). Gyekye maintains that observation and experience are part of African traditional sources of knowledge for instance agriculture and herbal medicine are the best examples of this point. (Gyekye,1997, p.26). Africans cannot engage in sustained investigations into the scientific foundations of their observations and experiences, which stunted the growth of science in Africa (Gyekye,1997, p.27).

Causal explanations have played a significant role in the growth of science (Gyekye,1997, p.28). Although African cultures appreciate the notion of causality, it “was generally understood in terms of spirit, of mystical power” (Gyekye,1997, p.28). Hence, in our African culture, empirical causation is substituted for supernatural causation and thereby stunting the growth of science. Gyekye says, “empirical causation, which asks what and how questions, too quickly gave way to agentive causation, which asks who and why questions” (Gyekye,1997, p.28). Agentive causation leads to the postulation of mystical powers and spirits as causal agents (Gyekye,1997, p.28). Mbiti explains that traditional African societies do not see physical and spiritual powers separately but rather, as “two dimensions of one and the same universe” (Mbiti, 1970, p.74). Considering, the significance of the notion of causality to understand natural phenomena, a culture that indulges in too much mystical and supernatural causality would hardly make progress in the scientific understanding of nature that can empirically be verified by a community of scientists of today and tomorrow (Gyekye,1997, p.28). I agree with Gyekye that religion and science can reinforce each other if they are used in their respective spheres of application. He says, “... in view of the tremendous importance of science for the progress of many other aspects of the

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culture, it should be able to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's" (Gyekye,1997, p.28).

*In Défense of a critical ethnophilosophy*

The increasing awareness of Indigenous values and beliefs led to a fundamental philosophical critique of scientific realism in the late 1950s and early 1960s which was the intellectual orthodoxy of most disciplines (Masolo, 2003, p.22). Philosophers of science such as Thomas Kuhn questioned the objective view from nowhere promoting the idea that knowledge is a social product. This, in turn, led to the recognition of the human factor in scientific theories. The central idea behind Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962) is the concept of "paradigms," which stand for objects of consensus in scientific establishments. The margin of agreement in scientific discourse is drawn by the norms of scientific practice which are put forward by the paradigms in question (Kuhn,1962, p.23). This implies that science is no longer the sole language to assess truth claims about the universe. Comparative knowledge of social and cultural values became an area of increasing interest. The dominance of scientific realism has blurred the boundaries between hard sciences, soft sciences, and the humanities in the name of seeking objective scientific knowledge. The contrast between constructed knowledge and what is "out there" to be discovered by scientists has been the most important way to frame a scientific inquiry. Helen Verran (2001) argues that culture plays a significant role in the formation of rationality. She argues that Western models of mathematical rationality have undermined other culturally sensitive models of rationality in the name of objectivity (p.25). She goes on to argue that since Western models of rationality are taken for granted, they are used as a way of marginalizing and

side-lining other ways of knowing. Thus, Verran attributes this clash of methodologies to the inability to adapt to different explanatory procedures that lead to a fruitful scientific engagement (2001, pp.25-26). She argues that African (Yoruba) students and intellectuals are forced to switch consciously between Western and African logic and mathematics. Thus, Verran argues that they can easily shift between various models of science (2001, p.28). She argues that the structure of theories is determined by politics or the expectations of the reactions of others as cohabitants or strangers of a certain epistemic space (Verran, 2001, p.29). Verran brings to our attention fundamental or methodological features of theories in general and scientific theories in particular. Which theories or systems can be described as foundational? What would be the implications of a theory of the universe that is entirely deterministic? These questions run in the face of the invincible epistemological position called realism -the claim that a view from nowhere is possible in the sense of mind-independent knowledge or knowledge devoid of subjectivity.

The African debate on ethnophilosophy is constitutive of the debate between scientific realism and social constructivism. The above discussion is in favour of constructivism in epistemology which is against Hountondji's critique of ethnophilosophy. In addition, the critical perspectives against scientific realism contributed to self-criticism on the part of Western intellectuals by asserting the validity of local knowledge claims on the ground of the social constructedness of knowledge reflecting socio-historical contexts of knowledge production.

The debate between particularism and universalism is internal to the debate between ethnophilosophers and professional philosophers in African philosophy. The

universality of Western philosophy and science is the outgrowth of European political, military, and economic imperialism that has come to define North-South relations since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Masolo, 2003, p.25). The current focus on “ethnoscience” is putting the foundational assumptions of Western science and philosophy under question. The term “indigenous” is becoming instructive in the quest for self-expression and self-representation of local communities in opposition to foreign ideas and concepts. The concept of indigeneity began to have a normative appeal to distinguish hegemonic ideas and values from local and domestic ideas and values (Masolo, 2003, p.25). It is a revolutionary concept with a Marxist prescription to liberate the oppressed and marginalized societies from the hegemonic Western political, economic, and political domination. Africa was depicted as an exotic, primitive, and backward place by anthropological and historical writings of the West (Masolo, 2003, p.25). Thus, scholarly works by Africans that imitate Western ethnology and anthropology are criticized by Hountondji as extroverted products of knowledge. Indigenous peoples are reduced to mere objects of scholarly work by metropolitan scholars (Spivak,1999). Political economists describe this process of knowledge production as the constitutive act of manufacturing dependency in the Third World. The exploration of African Indigenous culture goes back to the ancient World (Mudimbe,1994). The genesis of African culture is studied by African scholars such as (Appiah, 1992; Mudimbe, 1988). Critical anthropological writings began to challenge the hegemonic discourse on Indigenous cultures and values in the 80s and 90s (Masolo, 2003, p.25). Particularly the authoritative claim to knowledge of indigeneity by metropolitan scholars has been put under scrutiny. The philosophical status of Indigenous knowledge has divided African scholars into different schools of thought. According to Hountondji, culture is a system

of responses or a readymade practical recipe in matters of life and death, meaning, medicine, agriculture, and soon (Abiola et al., 1997, p. 201). Thus, Indigenous knowledge has the raw materials for philosophical reflection, but critical thinking seems to be absent. Although he recognizes the potency of any culture for philosophical reflection, he is against the attempt to equate a communal worldview to a critical individual thought or philosophy. The need to pursue a development strategy that is deeply embedded in local customs and traditions is legitimate in the sense that it provides a potent foundation to produce knowledge in Africa. However, this can be done only if one exploits the methodological and epistemological tools of the West. Building the capability of a nation to deploy its material and intellectual resources for its transformation is crucial to bringing about sustainable development. To that end, it is imperative to relate to the culture and values of African communities to produce sustainable strategies that will deliver to the concrete demands of Indigenous communities.

Scholars such as Sandra Harding began to take a radical position on this subject asserting the ethnological dimension of scientific knowledge. She reiterates that aside from objectivity, universal validity, and rationality the assertion of scientific knowledge must be properly local. Anti-hegemonic perspectives such as feminism and indigenous studies share a common claim that no matter how universal in scope it may be, science must be locally grounded. Thus, ethnophilosophy is based on this ethnoscientific quest for local contexts of knowledge. According to Sandra Harding, the core subject of the social and cultural studies of science and technology (SCSST) has been to demonstrate that practices and cultures shape the cognitive content of modern sciences (Harding, 1997, p.37). Thus, the claim to universality, objectivity, and rationality are specific to a

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culture, not transcultural claims that are internal to a scientific process (Harding, 1997, p.37). The epistemological position of SCSST is like comparative anthropological studies of modern science and ethnoscience which took shape in the 1960s. The technoscientific discourse reduces any claim to knowledge to a local belief system denying the conventional distinction between objective and subjective truth claims (Harding, 1997, p.37). Harding points out that the proponents of this discourse argue that the comparative explanatory advantage of modern sciences does not follow from their rationality, objectivity, and universality (Harding, 1997, p.37). Both SCSST and comparative anthropological studies reject the transcultural and internalist epistemology of conventional Western Science. But in the eyes of philosophers and historians of science, scientists, and policymakers these two schools of thought have produced untoward conclusions (Harding, 1997, p.38). Harding points out that their constructivist premises and their wholesale rejection of the notions of objectivity, rationality, and universality of Western sciences are unacceptable (Harding, 1997, p.38). Harding identifies a third category of school in contemporary science studies, which does not abandon the conventional epistemological notions. Rather they want to take advantage of these notions to identify “patterns of historically-determinate components of sciences” (Harding, 1997, p.38). According to Harding, the proponents of this third school are Western feminist scholars and SCSST from the global South including development theorists who criticize science and technology transfer models to the global South (Harding, 1997, p.38). Scholars of SCSST from the global South aspire to invent a new scientific paradigm and development strategy for the South that is deeply rooted in the traditional and social needs of the peoples of the South and the most marginalized and vulnerable segments of the global population. This attempt to

recentre epistemological concerns by feminist and postcolonial scholars has not been welcomed by the proponents of the mainstream epistemological traditions. Because feminist and postcolonial studies “reject the internalist status of epistemology -- a position that the older histories, philosophies, epistemologies, and sociologies of science will not countenance” (Harding, 1997, p.38). Harding points out that the feminist and postcolonial epistemological trends totally recognize the cultural situatedness of modern sciences. The feminist and postcolonial schools recognize the need to develop a strong epistemological stance that SCSST and comparative anthropological studies have endorsed (Harding, 1997, p.38). To that end, their approach to knowledge acquisition involves appropriating and building upon the central tenets of conventional epistemology save its internalist thesis that undermines the legitimacy of non-Western ethnoscience (Harding, 1997, p.39). The feminist and postcolonial schools have been trying to identify the social, economic, and political factors that contribute to the growth or decline of human knowledge. Although these schools reject the internalist premises of conventional epistemology they do accept its central notions without losing sight of the cultural situatedness of knowledge. Harding says the feminist and post-colonial or what she calls Southern SCSST schools are misunderstood by SCSST and comparative anthropological studies as being oblivious and unappreciative of the criticisms of internalist epistemology (Harding, 1997, p.39). She argues that the Northern SCSST and comparative anthropological studies are concerned with a critique of internalist epistemology oblivious of the significance of internalist epistemology for other kinds of anti-internalist projects (Harding, 1997, p.39).

The comprehension of language is the gateway to truth in the analytic tradition. The philosopher examines language to uncover the theoretical assumptions and

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meaning embedded in the everyday form of language. The link between speech and philosophy is clearly demonstrated by the late Rwandan philosopher and anthropologist Alexis Kagame. He clearly showed the philosophical potential of local African languages in the sense that daily language is loaded with philosophical ideas. Kagame also demonstrated that the translation of a language into another language may risk a loose and ambiguous rendition of the ontological and other implications that are inherent to a language. The point is a genuine philosophical reflection begins with every day, the familiar, which is embedded in the Indigenous knowledge and linguistic traditions of African societies. This idea finds its philosophical basis in the ordinary language philosophy of Western philosophy. The significance of everyday language is emphasized both in the analytic and continental tradition in which most African philosophers are trained. For example, Wiredu draws on the analytic tradition as exemplified by Quine and Hountondji draws on the continental tradition as exemplified by Derrida.

Hountondji (1983) and Wiredu (1980) contend that a genuine African philosophical engagement begins through a parallel exercise in a robust scientific discourse. Although Wiredu is less radical than Hountondji when it comes to faith in reason and science, he is convinced that reason is a universal category that applies regardless of geographical and racial origins. Hountondji (1983) says “the politicization of philosophical discourse...constitutes the most serious obstacle to any theory of the political” (p.175). But the proponents of ethnophilosophy defend cultural relativism, that is, an extensive generalization that knowledge is constituted by its social, cultural, ecological, and linguistic origin. But the rationalist argument affirms the principle of non-contradiction that no proposition can be both true and false at the same time. The affirmation of a particular epistemological position should not risk arrogance by way of

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an over-generalization about the ultimate way to truth. Although the attempt to produce a criterion for truth is compelling, some dose of scepticism must be in order to leave room for a new methodology. The cultural relativist debunks the rationalist position in philosophy and science. Because if the cultural relativist is right, it is impossible to disagree on ground evidence or reason since the terms of discourse are mutually exclusive. Because the cultural relativist terms cannot necessarily have the same meaning but only accidentally. That is, the meaning of terms in a language derives not from the outside world but rather from a set of linguistic conventions internal to a specific linguistic community. Thus, this argument destroys the whole idea of the possibility of a rational and objective truth claim. The concepts of rationality, objectivity, and universality depend on applying universal standards to ascertain the truth and falsity of propositions. But if we assume that the rules of thought are relative to a culture then we cannot adjudicate incommensurable truth claims from two distinct cultural communities. This leads to the conclusion that all claims to knowledge are fundamentally relative, subjective, and particular to the context of their enunciation.

### *Conclusion*

It is wrong to conceive Indigenous values and beliefs as immune to criticism in the name of unanimity. A critical attitude towards Indigenous values and beliefs is crucial to make them compatible with the increasing dialogical complexity of the world in political, cultural, and economic spheres. Hountondji endorses rootedness in a local tradition as the core of development and this makes Indigenous knowledge vital to efforts aimed at African development in contrast to the colonial denigration of African traditions and values. The worldview of society evolves in the course of history linking

the imaginations and values of generations of people from the past, the present, and the future by passing certain intellectual habits on to successive generations. Indigenous knowledge is a live option for philosophical reflection in the African context. But it should be subjected to a formal epistemic analysis to integrate it into the written words of scientific discourse.

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