

Review of: "Honorific Conception of Philosophy and Exclusionism in Nigeria"

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The reviewed paper focuses on the important and undoubtedly research-worthy problem of exclusionism. This idea is discussed both as the social-political problem of the contemporary African society and as a philosophical issue with a long tradition in human thought. According to the authors, it is somehow related to the perceived superiority of Greek philosophy, commonly considered as paradigmatic for human thinking.

In the first part, the authors analyze various examples and practices of exclusionism, as they put it themselves, "among Europeans". However, their focus is on the "exclusionary" ideas in Western philosophy, from its very beginning in ancient Greece to contemporary times, including 20th-century thinkers such as Heidegger. The second part of the paper focuses on the issue of African exclusionism based on examples of various social and political divisions in contemporary Nigerian society. This chapter is particularly interesting because it presents, from an African perspective, how African exclusionism relates to European and, more broadly, Western exclusionism. The examples discussed are of a highly empirical nature and offer a deeper and quite inquisitive insight into historical facts and various political, social and cultural circumstances in which contemporary Nigerians live (including the most recent facts, such as the last presidential election, the details of party politics or ethnic exclusionism based on the language factor, etc.). Since the authors are discussing the problem of internal exclusionism in the African society, perhaps it would be good to somehow refer to one of the best known, though also the most tragic case of such exclusionary policy, which took place in Rwanda? It could be interesting, since this genocide was also partially inspired by Europeans (i.e. Belgians, who stimulated existing social divisions in Rwandan society in order to realize their own political goals; see, for example, Smith 1994). I would also suggest adding some philosophical concepts and theories that could better explain the issue of exclusionism and thus enrich this research, such as the Hegelian category of recognition (see, for example, Taylor 1994) or Levinas' notion of otherness.

However, in my review, I would like to focus particularly on the first part of the paper, in which the authors present, among others, what Western philosophers have said about African people or their philosophical abilities. Of course, I do not want to deny that such opinions concerning various nations or women were in fact formulated by thinkers from Aristotle to Hegel and Heidegger, but perhaps they need to be read a bit more critically, i.e. taking into consideration the historical context in which they were formulated? When we read ancient texts, such as the Bible, and we want to understand literally what is written in that book, we may sometimes come to the conclusion that it does not make any sense at all, as the authors of that work refer to historical and cultural details that were known only to people who lived in the times when it was written. For instance, Aristotle considered slavery to be natural. In the reality in which he lived, slavery was widespread and was in fact a somewhat "natural" part of the ancient world. According to some ancient accounts, Plato himself was sold into

slavery during one of his visits to the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius (see Brickhouse and Smith).

I also found some other simplifications in the text. For example, on the page 10 the authors write that “Plato excluded women from politics because they do not share the same status and dignity as men.” This is simply wrong, as Plato is one of those ancient thinkers who, contrary to popular opinion, considered women to be equal to men and having the same nature, so much so that, according to him, “when it comes to guarding a city, both a woman and a man possess the same natural attributes” (Plato 2003, 152). In fact, he adds that “They differ only in strength and weakness” (152), that is to say, women are weaker, but only on a general level, that is, when we refer to the male and female sex in general, because on the other hand “there are plenty of individual women who are better at all sorts of things than individual men” (152).

Therefore, according to Plato, women are definitely not excluded from the politics. On the contrary, he states that “none of the activities connected with running a city belong to a woman because she is a woman, nor to a man because he is a man. Natural attributes are evenly distributed between the two sexes, and a woman is naturally equipped to play her part in all activities, just as a man is” (152). In brief, Plato’s views on women and their role in politics are definitely more complex than the authors claim. Although some researchers admit that another dialogue, namely *Timaeus*, “seems to indicate an essential inferiority of women” (Garside Allen 1975, 131), they at the same time emphasize that this apparent contradiction in his views “is resolved in an underlying consistent view of the nature of women and men” (138) and in Plato’s belief in the immortality of the soul.

In particular, I cannot agree with the thesis formulated in the first part of the paper that “teaching that philosophy began in Greece put all the other great civilizations, like Babylon, Egypt or Jews, into question” (p. 2). Obviously, traditions of thought other than Greek are undoubtedly worth studying, and philosophers all over the world have done so before and continue to do so today. For instance, Schopenhauer’s 19th-century metaphysics was heavily inspired by Hindu sacred texts, such as the Upanishads; there are interesting studies on the similarities and differences between the German idealist thinker F. W. J. Schelling and Japanese thought (see Hahn 2009), in the Middle Ages the so-called Arabic philosophers, such as Avicenna or Averroes, were strongly influenced by the works of Greek thinkers (e.g. Plato and Aristotle), 20th century thinkers such as Martin Buber show that it is possible to combine Jewish religious traditions with philosophical thought, and so forth. However, philosophy in this sense in which the term is taught at universities actually originated in ancient Greece, so when we teach that this is the work of Greek genius, we are only telling the truth.

Although other civilizations had their own worldview as well as their own scientific achievements (e.g. they had a vast knowledge in the field of astronomy, medicine, mathematics, etc., and they shared this knowledge with the Greeks, as well), philosophy, defined as the love of wisdom, i.e. a way of thinking that is at the same time critical, abstract, rational, logical, and explains all reality within the framework of the notions which are not mythical (e.g. no longer identified with gods or personifications of the forces of nature), originated in Greece. According to many scholars, it is no coincidence that rational thought traces its origins to Greece. For instance, according to Jean-Pierre Vernant (1982), it is so because it is “bound up with the social and mental structures peculiar to the Greek city” (130). As he further puts it, “The Greeks thus added a new dimension to the history of human thought” (131-132).

The authors’ suggestion that “the attitude that philosophy has a Greek beginning was introduced in the late eighteenth

century by historians” (p. 5-6), since supposedly only in this period were manuscripts (which manuscripts? Greek?) brought to Europe and “translated into European languages, creating room for scientific appropriation” (p. 6) also seems to be at least a bit simplified, since the most important Greek philosophical sources were well known in Europe much earlier, practically from the beginning of the Middle Ages, and philosophy in the sense of the term in which it is currently taught in academia was always somehow aware of its Platonic-Aristotelian spirit.

Furthermore, in reconstructing Hume’s views on different nations, the authors claim that according to Hume “only the West” possesses the reason and can philosophize, while “the other species of men simply have religious beliefs” (p. 4-5), and as far as I understand this is an argument that (Western) philosophy in general has an exclusionary character. Actually, this is a bit complicated, because Hume lived in an Enlightenment era, and although in his empirical epistemology he strongly privileged the senses as the only source of knowledge, when talking about some general issues (such as the nations of the world) he seems to share a more general attitude of his times, in which it was reason which mattered the most. However, philosophy in general (by which I mean a “honorific conception of philosophy”) does not have to exclude a religious worldview. For instance, Greek philosophy was born out of myth, and some authors (e.g. G. Colli, K. Kerényi) emphasize the importance of primordial “irrationality”, religious madness expressed in various Greek rituals, and religious inspiration (such as the Socratic one) for the beginnings of logical thought. In the Middle Ages in Europe, there was no philosophy other than the religious one – in fact, it was based on the synthesis of Greek thought with the Christian revelation made by the first Christian philosophers (the so-called Church Fathers) in late antiquity. In both the 19th and 20th centuries, there are also philosophers who somehow combine philosophy with religion, and so forth.

To conclude, although the paper is interesting, and the topic is undoubtedly worthy of study, some statements seem to me to be overly simplistic. For example, as far as I understand, the authors defend the thesis that the lack of African philosophy is a consequence of the fact that these nations were treated as “inferior” and “deprived of reason”. However, colonialism is not an exclusively “African” phenomenon. Some nations of Eastern Europe were also for a long time “colonialized” in some way by the West. Today, Ukrainians and other smaller Eastern European nations that were Soviet republics during the Cold War also claim that Russia’s policies towards them have a colonial character. Does this not mean that the problem is simply more complex? In brief, when we treat philosophy as a kind of practice in MacIntyre’s sense of the term, that is to say as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve this standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity” (see MacIntyre 2013, 218) there is no need to worry that not all people philosophize. It does not mean that they are inferior people without dignity. Similarly, I can learn the rules and play the piano or the tennis, but if I do not know how to play these games, does that mean that I do not have human dignity? In Poland there were practically no philosophers until the 18th and 20th centuries – does this mean that Polish people were deprived of human dignity? If there is no skiing champion in a country, does that mean that nation is inferior because no one practices skiing? Perhaps people in this country have other skills and can be good at some other kind of activity? Perhaps African or South American thought is simply a different kind of social practice?

In short, perhaps such a notion that the nation must have philosophers in order to be fully “human” only repeats the very

Enlightenment attitude that it seeks to combat? Similarly, when the authors claim that “colonization was birthed by exclusionism, which was incorporated into philosophy by the Enlightenment philosophers” (p. 7), this is also a simplification, as this suggests that Enlightenment philosophers and their theories are responsible for the colonial policies of the West. However, as the authors point out in the “Conclusions” (p. 11), colonialism in its various forms was well known in human history much earlier than Enlightenment philosophy, so perhaps philosophers only conceptualized a kind of thinking which would exist independently of their thinking? And what does it mean that thinkers such as Kant “radicalized global exclusionism” (p. 11)? Obviously, he repeated some untrue opinions about the abilities of different nations that were widespread in his time, but at the same time he formulated universal ethical views that have strongly inspired e.g. contemporary theories of universal human rights, which contradict exclusionary thinking. Does this not mean that this issue is also at least a bit more complex? To sum up, although the paper discusses an important issue of the relationship between philosophy and political action, I would suggest explaining more precisely how, according to the authors, they are interrelated. Or, to put it another way, what exactly is the relationship between “honorific conception of philosophy” and actual acts of political exclusionism.

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