

Review of: "Okolo on the Question of African Philosophy and its Periodization"

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I am by no means an expert in African Philosophy (as editor of *Sophia* I do read every article on African Philosophy that is submitted, and I do include African Philosophy of Religion in Postcolonial Critique of standard Philosophy of Religion in the project called Global and Critical Philosophy of Religion). Since I do cross-cultural and postcolonial philosophy also, it is from this perspective that I would like to submit my comments. It strikes me that Professor Okolo has fallen into the erstwhile trap of what we in Eastern thought call Orientalism (after Schwab and Said), and the grandiose biases that have entered the fields of all non-Western disciplines and inquiries, from linguistics, philology, anthropology, sciences, arts, literature, to (not least) philosophy. There were many well-schooled philosophers in Europe and Britain (later in the US and Oceania too) who perpetuated a certain myth about the genealogy of non-Western thought (and they variously used philology, etymology and textual analyses to justify their claims). Hence, to take the case of India (and in passing East Asia) for now, when read against the philosophies of the Antiquity, Medieval Christian (with smattering of Islamic interpolations right up to Ibn Rushd or Averroes), and indeed (European) Enlightenment breakthroughs down to Logical Positivism and the rise of Analytic Philosophy, the tracts of the various periods of Indian (and Chinese) intellectual history appeared to them variously to be “fantastical babblings of infants” (Müller) “abominable hogswallop” (Hacker), and “polymorphically perfidiously perverse phantasia” (Hegel), and so forth

So Basically, philosophy never happened in India or China (i.e. much of Asia) until the arrival of Western philosophy on their shores; the incoming or settled missionaries, Jesuits, East India Company judges and literati schoolmen set down to educate the dreamy natives about the profound depths and wisdom of Western philosophy since antiquity. Plethora of Indians interested in philosophy disbanded their early Sanskritic learnings and turned to reading Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Hume, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, down to Quine, Russell, Wittgenstein, and they set about re-constructing Indian Philosophy (and Sino-Japanese Philosophy) in light of these learnings. They were more preoccupied with solving problems of philosophy (in logic, language, mind, religion) as they were treated in the Western halls and oeuvres of philosophy than in their own by-gone traditions (some of which had been kept alive by traditional or native scholastic pandits). So it goes without saying that to the generations growing up in the colonial times, Indian/Asian Philosophy is born only with the advent of colonialism and the European introduction of philosophy to the Eastern world.

Henry Odera Oruka (who I had the honour of meeting in Nairobi where my mother was born, and conversing with; he also kindly published an article of mine) was in communication with Professor Bimal Matilal of All Souls College in Oxford University over this matter, and about how the same pattern might have been repeated in the dis-recognition or maligning

of the uniqueness and worth of sagely African Philosophy. This latter position is untenable, and indeed is redolent of a neo-colonial mind-set not yet fully discarded in the two continents in question (Asia and Africa). It is time to get over this self-denigration and come out of Plato's cave; risking what Gayatri Chakravorty chides as 'civilizationalism' (but in the reverse also), I would say we have as much if not more sunshine than the ancient Greeks and Enlightenment Europeans could experience or withstand, because of their fear of light (even Heidegger confessed he did not care for sunshine, but at laest he took to chopping wood and drawing well-water in the Black Forest, as well as conversing for long periods with classically-trained Indian and Chinese philosophers). Heidegger wanted to but could not because of the legacy from Hegel, through Nietzsche that he had inherited (and since passed onto Paul Hacker and Wilhelm Halbfass to an extent), to give more respect to these traditions than to the ancients of their own self-claimed origins – which really was one with the Oriental world after all (since the Indo-Greek trade and other exchanges in the Bactrian regions, or the precursor of the Silk Caravan Road). The Medieval Persian-Arabic philosophers did not think of Hellenistic (Greek and Roman-Latin) philosophies as something stemming from the "West" (or the modern world or even Occidental), as to them these were as much Oriental as their's was with a mix of Abrahamic interjections coming from Christians, Judaic scholars and their own Islamic scholastic sages. Suppose the Macedonian-to-Alexandria region that Aristotle was linked with was called Mediterranean-African and the rest as Oriental or Middle Eastern, and Rome did not claim to be the harbinger of the "West", we would then not have the sharp chasm between Western on one side and (Middle/SouthFar-) Eastern-African-Pacific-Mexican [Latina] on the other side.

The envy that drives one to align philosophy (even of traditional , sagely and classical heritages) only with the Western philosophical pedigree, and hence shifting the periodic table globally to align oneself with Enlightenment philosophy is rather disingenuous; I would even say treason to their own philosophical roots. This whole wrong-headed trajectory has to be reversed, or we shall remain victims to what Heidegger rightly underscored as the threat of the "Europeanisation of the Earth" (which Husserl who coined the dictum thought was an inevitable project within the Hegelian historicist vision).