

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: THE SEARCH
FOR A METHOD OR REDISCOVERY OF ITS CONTENT ?

I

The purpose of this paper is to present the background to the current debate on African Philosophy and to offer some Criticisms and recommendations where I find it appropriate to do so. The issue of African Philosophy is one that animates the following questions: "What is African Philosophy?" It appears that in an attempt to address the former, the debate has shifted primarily to the latter, and in doing so the essential issue which is the content of African Philosophy seems to have been either abandoned or considered less important.

I shall begin, however, with what I consider to be the cause of the controversy, with the points raised on *writing* as the vehicle of reason's expression. To deny a people the capacity to reason is to deny them the possibility for critical reflections on their thoughts, beliefs, practices, and rational justification for them. Consequently, it is to question their capacity for philosophical dialogue.

Writing, many scholars argued, stood alone among the fine arts as the most salient repository of 'genius', the visible sign of reason itself. In this subordinate role, however, writing, although secondary to reason, is nevertheless the *medium* of reason's expression. We know reason by writing, by its representations. Such representations could assume spoken or written form. And while several superb scholars give priority to the spoken as the privileged of the pair, most Western scholars privileged *writing* — in their writings about Africans, at least as the principal measure of Africans' humanity, their capacity to progress, their very place in the great chain of being.

The direct correlation between economic and political alienation on the one hand, and racial alienation on the other hand, Henry Louis Gates wrote, is epitomized in the following 1740 South Carolina Statute that

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attempted to make it almost impossible for black slaves to acquire, let alone master literacy:

And *whereas* the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attending with great inconveniences; be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write; every such person or persons shall, for every offence, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money.¹

Learning to read and write, then was not only difficult, for the black slaves, it was a violation of the law. As early as 1705, a Dutch explorer, William Bosman, had encased the commodity function of writing and its relation to racial and economic alienation in a myth which Africans he 'discovered' had purportedly related to him. According to Bosman, the Blacks believed that in the beginning God created Black as well as White men; thereby giving the Blacks the first election, "who chose Gold, and left the knowledge of Letters to the white". In granting their request God was incensed at their avarice and resolved that "the whites should forever be their masters, and they obliged to wait on them as their slaves".²

Bosman's fabrication, of course, was a claim of origins designed to sanction through mythology a political order created by Europeans. But it was Hume, writing midway through the 18th century, who gave to Bosman's myth the sanction of Enlightenment of philosophical reasoning. In a major essay, *Of National Characters* (1748), Hume discussed the "characteristics" of the world's major division of human races. In a footnote Hume added in 1753 to his original text, he posited with all the authority of philosophy the fundamental identity of complexion, character, and intellectual capacity:

I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There was never a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, *no arts, no sciences*. Such a uniform and constant difference made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men there are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity....³

Citing the case of the Jamaican born poet and Cambridge educated, Francis Williams, who wrote verse in Latin, Hume referred to William's

achievements "as very slender.... like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly".⁴ Hume's opinion on the subject, as we might expect, became prescriptive. In his *Observations on The Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Kant elaborates on Hume's essay in Section 4, entitled "Of National Characteristics So Far as They Depend Upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime". Kant first claims that the fundamental difference between "the black and white races of man ... appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color".⁵ Kant, moreover, is one of the earliest major European philosophers to conflate color with intelligence, a determining relation he posits with dictatorial surety:

Father Labat reports that a Negro carpenter, whom he reproached for laughty treatment toward his wives, answered, "You whites are indeed fools, for first you make great concessions to your wives, and afterward you complain when they drive you mad." And it might be that there were something in this which perhaps deserved to be considered; but in short, this fellow was quite black from head to foot, clear proof that what he said was stupid.⁶

The correlation of "black" and "stupid" Kant posits as if it were self evident.

Hegel, echoing Hume and Kant, claimed that Africans had no history, because they had developed no systems of writing and had not mastered the art of writing in European languages. In judging civilizations, Hegel's strictures with respect to the absence of written history presume a crucial role for *memory*, a collective, cultural memory. Metaphors of the childlike nature of slaves, of the masked, puppet-like personality of the black, all share this assumption about the absence of memory. As Martin Bernal (1987) points out, Hegel's true feelings seemed to emerge in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*,⁷ given between 1816 and 1830, where Hegel explicitly showed his love for Europe, respect for the Asian mountains and India, a complete contempt for Africa.⁸

Mary Langdon, in her novel *Ida May: A Story of Things Actual and Possible* (1854), writes that "they (Africans) are mere children ... you seldom hear them say much about anything that's past, if they only get enough to eat and drink at the present moment".⁹

The above picture of Africa and Africans was further echoed by Levy-Bruhl when he described Africans as "primitive" and of "primitive mentality" - a mentality which is pre-logical, pre-scientific, pre-literate, etc. The term "pre-philosophy" is of course a logical consequence of the culture and life of the primitive man which perhaps leaves the hope that this culture might one day evolve into a scientific and reason-oriented

culture. In reaction to Levy-Bruhl's claim, Oruka in his "Sagacity in African Philosophy" writes: "Levy-Bruhl and the anthropologists of his kind left no such hope (for Africa): what they claimed to have established in Africa were: (a) the impossibility for a philosophical dialogue and, (b) an obvious non-existence of a tradition of organized philosophical systems".¹⁰ Oruka notes that the latter is a logical consequence of the former, while the former follows as a "tautology from the fact of the nature of the black man's mind, a primitive mentality".¹¹

The foregoing claim running from Bosman to Hume, Kant, Hegel and Levy-Bruhl seems to define consistently that without writing, no *respectable* sign of the workings of reason could exist. And by parity of reasoning, without memory or mind, no history could exist; without history no humanity. Consequently, the current debate on the nature of African Philosophy arose as a response to allegations to its absence.

II

Africans and people of African descent responded to these profoundly serious allegations about their "nature" as directly as they could. Accused of lacking a formal and collective philosophy, African philosophers and philosophers of African descent dispersed throughout the world (as well as their sympathizers) published individual accounts of "philosophies" in Africa, which, taken together, were intended to narrate in segments the larger yet fragmented African philosophy. In the attempt to create an authentic voice — a voice of deliverance from the deafening discursive silence which an enlightened Europe cited to prove the absence of philosophy and therefore African's humanity, an unhealthy debate emerged - a debate on methodology rather than the content of African philosophy.

There is no doubt that the content of any subject area presupposes its methodology since it is the methodology that defines its subject matter, and it is methodology that delineates the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences one from the other, however, the three decades of the debate on the nature of African philosophy seems to be an unnecessary storm in a tea pot. To avoid the risk of repetitiveness or overcanvassing the main lines in that debate, four major trends can be discerned in contemporary African Philosophy: (a) Ethno-philosophy, (b) Philosophic Sagacity, (c) Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy and (d) Professional Philosophy.

I do not intend to take issue as such with any of the factions except

to show that the energy and time dissipated on the debate should have been channeled into reconstructing the African past which either major migrational trends or colonialism had fragmented. This will be made clear when we discuss in detail in the next section the importance of ancient Egypt in that reconstruction. But suffice it to say, as Keita (1986) points out, that one way to resolve the issue concerning the foundations of contemporary African philosophy would be to locate the historical roots of African thought in the literate ideas of ancient Egyptian thought and Medieval Africa in conjunction with philosophical analysis of traditional ethnic beliefs.¹²

Ethno-Philosophy: Placid Tempels' Bantu Philosophy is an example of a text that is no longer considered real anthropology but which has gained the status and influence in its time, and its ghostly presence keeps returning in the debates over the nature of African philosophy. Tempels begins his work by blaming the misunderstanding between Europe and Africa on Europe's failure to recognize the African worldview as a valid philosophy. It is Tempels' argument that unless Europe tries to understand the African metaphysic, "the gulf between Africans and whites will remain and widen so long as we do not meet them in the wholesome aspirations of their own ontology".¹³ African ontology, Tempels continues, is identified as a single value: vital force and the African life finds its resonance in terms of a balance of forces; African cultural formations are mechanisms for maintaining that balance. It is by this worldview that the Bantu (Africa) differs essentially from the European. So, a proper articulation of the value system inherent in the culture of Africa (Bantu in Tempels' work) has to be situated within the metaphysical matrix that underlies that culture. In order to avoid the Eurocentrism of Kant and his group, a kind of hypothetical sympathy is needed to understand the African ontology and this requires picking up the other end of the walking stick in order to appreciate and perspectivize the African metaphysical framework.

Similarly, Leopold Senghor's "Negritude" has argued that logic is Greek as emotion is African. European philosophy is also taken to be individualistic, that is, a body of thoughts produced or formulated by various individual thinkers. So "communalism" as opposed to "individualism" is brought forth as the essential attribute of African Philosophy. Consequently, according to proponents of this view, African philosophy is identified with communal or folk philosophy. As Tempels succinctly puts it in Bantu Philosophy, the "wisdom of Bantu based on the philosophy of vital force is accepted by everyone, it is not subjected to

"criticism" for it is taken by the whole community as the "imperishable truth".¹⁴

One also witnesses Leo Apostel's forceful defence of this view of African philosophy founded on the principles of African thought as articulated by Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* and Kagame's (1956) *La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de L'etre*.¹⁵ Apostel's position conduces to the view that in the interest of the mutual interpretation of Africa and the west, critical, demonstrative and polemical expositions of varieties of the (African) Bantu worldview should be developed and presented.¹⁶

As defined by both African and European scholars, ethno-philosophy serves the function of the subjective valorization of traditional African thought in contradistinction to colonial anthropological thought which engaged in a purportedly objective devalorization of the African intellectual efforts. Genuine African philosophy consists, therefore, of descriptive comments on ethnological concepts of time, ethics, personhood and general cosmology.¹⁷

Yet others raise the question as to whether the belief systems discussed by ethno-philosophers may be regarded as genuinely philosophical for the following reasons:

- (a) every philosophy is explicit, not implicit,
- (b) every philosophy is systematic, and not just intuitive,
- (c) every philosophy entails the existence of proof, and critical comparison of systems with each other. If these requirements

are accepted, one can at best take ethno-philosophy to represent a worldview and not a philosophy in the technical sense of it.¹⁸

Philosophic Sagacity

In a recent article of Odera Oruka "Sagacity in African Philosophy"¹⁹ Oruka tries to advance a solution to the above problems raised for ethno-philosophy by arguing that African philosophy could be founded on the ideas of rigorous indigenous thinkers in various African ethnic groups. Even where these thinkers (sages) do not have the benefit of modern education, they none-the-less are original and critical independent thinkers who have the art for speculative and reflective reasoning as well as the capacity for rational judgment rather than by the authority of the communal consensus. According to Oruka, these sages "are capable of taking a problem or a concept and offer a rigorous philosophical analysis of it making clear rationally where they accept or reject the established or

communal judgement on the matter".²⁰

Judging from Oruka's thesis, it is, however, difficult to extricate philosophical sagacity from the very problems for which Oruka rejects ethno-philosophy. Even though Oruka argues that philosophic sagacity is both "dialectic and individualistic", the reason adduced that "it is a thought or reflection of various known or named individual thinkers"²¹ begs the question. It also appears that Oruka's claim that philosophical sagacity is the movement in African philosophy best equipped to "give an all acceptable decisive blow to the position of ethno-philosophy" is not fully adequate since it can be argued that philosophic sagacity seems to be an attempt to re-enunciate the principles of ethno-philosophy²². It is hard to sustain that Oruka's "Sages" can philosophize in a vacuum, that is to say, independent of the cultural matrix or the belief system from which their thoughts operate; and the fact that they happen to think more dialectically cannot be taken as enough ground to claim that the view they espouse are original. The novelty of their "Philosophies" would certainly derive their characterization from the fact that they must have been founded on critical analysis of existing belief systems. The absence of this proof in written form makes Oruka's claim spurious and hence the distinction he tries to make arduous.

Nationlist-Oriented Philosophy

Other contributions to the debate came from nationalist-oriented scholars like Nkrumah and Nyerere²³ who argue that since colonialism was built on the ruins of what was supposed to be the cardinal ethical principle (maxim) of traditional humanist Africa - communalism - the required social theory, Nkrumah claims need to embrace communalism as one of its basic tenets.

In communalism, a person's ethical or political capacity can roughly be said to be measured by the span of his "we". Individualism marks off an isolated "I", and beyond this boundary discovers only "he" and "she", finding ethical contests in the clashes of these irreducible cores, the one against the many, each unit pursuing its own interest. Communalism finds "others" and even in its pluralistic nature, (it) is couched in sympathetic capacities. The individual is so moved to identify with the other that the capacity to say "we" emerges. The individual is stretched over to the other and doesn't stop with the individual's skin but overflows to the kin. Ethical maturity comes with a widening of that sense of kinship, and, with broad enough recognition of this togetherness, the

self is immersed in a communal life. The dialectics between the individual and the "other" culminates in a communal structure and as Nyerere wrote in *Ujamaa* " ... the individual was poor or rich only to the extent that the society was poor or rich and vice versa ".²⁴

There is no doubt that communalism, either as an ethical or political philosophy finds a comfortable niche in the general metaphysical framework of African Holistic View. However, it is claimed by critics that the nationalist-oriented philosophers lacked the philosophic tools to properly articulate the essential features of their philosophy. Using the Marxist dialectics to demonstrate the striking similarity between communalism (African socialism) and the Marxist model, they robbed their "philosophy" of what would have been distinctively African in it.

Professional (Book) Philosophers

Rejecting the assumptions of ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity and national-ideological philosophy, a group that has come to be known as philosophers of the "Books" claims that African philosophy started with formal education and contact with the west. Philosophy, the group argues, "must have the same meaning in all cultures" although its content might be culture bound.²⁵

In a much more forceful and radical tone, Hountondji advocates a complete departure from the "ghetto" of ethnic difference, a *prise de conscience* by the African of contemporary rather than traditional reality:

Nous devons a tout prix liberer notre pensee du ghetto Africaniste ou on a voulu l'enfermer.²⁶

(We must at all costs liberate our thought from the Africanist ghetto where some have sought to lock it up).

Towa in "Essai Sur la Problematique Philosophique dans l'Afrique Actuelle".²⁷, shares Hountondji's view and claims that to be different, to have an identity, is to be a slave. In regard to all worship of difference and identity, "we must cultivate a systematic skepticism, without which we run the risk of confirming our own servitude".²⁸ In order to gain the "secret of the West", one renounces the secrets of Africa. The anti ethno-philosophers ask rhetorically: "What is African?"

It is, therefore, the contention of Book philosophers (European Books) that even though pre-literate societies, Africans or otherwise, express their worldview, their shared ideas on reality in their works of art, drawings, religion, myths; this is not philosophy in the strict sense of a

rational, systematic activity of a reflecting people .²⁹

This view is further canvassed by Wiredu when he argues that contemporary African philosopher has "no written tradition of written philosophy in his continent to draw upon". Comparing him to his Indian counterpart, Wiredu claims that whereas the Indian has "longstanding written philosophical heritage to advert his mind",³⁰ the same cannot be said of the African.

But in Africa where according to Wiredu "we do not have even a written traditional philosophy, anthropologists have fastened on our folk world views and elevated them to the status of a continental philosophy".³¹

To say the least we find Wiredu's position unacceptable and very shocking. The situation is all the more compounded by the fact that colonial and post colonial African universities were modelled essentially after their European counterparts. Consequently, philosophy in African institutions means European philosophy, either Anglo-American or continental philosophy and often a combination of the two. The pioneers responsible for this model happened to be of course the "Book Philosophers" trained as it were in the West. To this group, the "march of modernization is destined to lead to the universalization of philosophy everywhere in the world".³²

In following this debate which has gone on for over two decades, one seems to observe an appalling ignorance and misrepresentation on the part of the so called Book Philosophers. When Wiredu and Hountondji argue that the African had no written philosophy or philosophical literature to draw upon, they seem to forget or ignore the African heritage in Ancient Egypt.

We need to point out some professional schools of thought in Ancient Egypt to demonstrate that the problem was not necessarily lack of written African philosophical literature to "advert their minds" but that the pioneer African philosophers had failed to do what their Indian counterparts had done with their own ancient heritage.

According to classical writers, Heliopolis was a major center of learning where, for instance Eudoxos studied and for the Freemasons, it was the epitome of ancient esoteric wisdom. The city was a major center of the sun-cult associated particularly with Ra who became associated with Osiris by the 18th Dynasty. The Hermitic texts refer repeatedly to this perfect city, founded by Hermes Trismegistos which is closely associated with the sun.³³ Writing about the cosmogony of Hermopolis, Bernal informs us that the first type of euphemism, the non-personalized

abstraction of natural forces, seems to have been present in Egyptian thought from the earliest times. It is certainly "true of the cosmogony of Hermopolis, which has been linked to Thoth and to the cosmogony of Taautos described by Sanchunation:.³⁴ The abstraction is indicated by the fact that not one of the eight gods of the city of Hermopolis, the four pairs of beings or forces from whom the universe was created had temples or cults, though they were sometimes equated with divinities which did.³⁵

Unanimous testimony of ancient scholars like Herodotus and Plutarch seem to reveal that the Greeks owe their philosophy and science to Ancient Egyptian. To use Bernal's aphorism (1987 p. 121), it was Egyptian wisdom and Greek transmission. In the "Isis and Osiris," Plutarch reported that, according to the testimony of all Greek scholars and philosophers taught by Egyptians, the latter were careful about secularizing their knowledge. Solon, Thales, Plato, Lycurgus, Pythagoras encountered difficulty before being accepted as students by the Egyptians. The Egyptians, according to Plutarch, seemed to have preferred Pythagoras because of his mystical temperament. As will be made clearer later, the Greek philosophical giants, notably Plato and Aristotle owe the originality of their thoughts to Egypt.

Amelineau in his Introduction to *Prolegomenes, a l'etude de la Religion Egyptieen* writes:

I also realized that the lofty genius of the Greeks had been able to present Egyptian ideas incomparably, especially in Plato; but I thought that what we loved in the Greeks, we should not scorn nor simply disdain in the Egyptians.³⁶

Amelineau's argument seems to be that when two authors, for instance, collaborate, the credit for their work in common is shared equally by each but in the case in question, "I fail to see why ancient Greece should reap all the honour for ideas she borrowed from Egypt."³⁷

The Athenian orator Isokrates in his *Bousiris*³⁸ portrayed the land of Egypt and its people as the most blessed in the world. Isokrates admired the caste system, the rulership of philosophers, and the rigor of the Egyptian philosopher/priest (paideia-education) that produced the contemplative man (anertheetikos) who used his superior wisdom for the good of his state. The division of labour allowed a "leisure", *schole*, which allowed for *schole*, "learning". Above all, Isokrates insisted that philosophy (philosophia) was, and could only have been, the product of Egypt. Writing about the Pythagoreans, Isokrates notes: "On a visit to Egypt Pythagoras became a student of the religion of the people, and was

the first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy".³⁹

There are striking similarities between Isokrates' *Bousiris* and Plato's *Republic*. In the latter, there was division of labour based on Castes ruled by enlightened Guardians produced by careful selection and rigorous education. We know that Plato spent some time, probably around 390 B.C. in Egypt. In *Phaedrus* Plato had Socrates declare that "He (Theuth) the Egyptian God of wisdom) it was who invented numbers and Arithmetic and Geometry ... and most important of all letters..."⁴⁰ In *Philebus* and *Epinomis*, Plato went into more detail on thought as the creator of writing, even of language and all sciences.⁴¹

Bernal (1987) argues that the only possible reason why Plato did not explicitly proclaim the *Republic* to be based on Egyptian political model was for the following reason:

Plato's contemporaries mocked him, saying that he was not the inventor of his *Republic*, but that he had copied Egyptian institutions. Plato attached so much importance to his rivals and mockers that he attributed to the Egyptians the story of the Athenians and the Atlantines to make them say that the Athenians had really lived under this regime at a certain moment in the past.⁴² It becomes clear why even in modern times scholars like Karl Marx accept that Plato's *Republic*, in so far as division of labour is treated in it, as the formative principle of the state, "is merely an Athenian idealization of the Egyptian system of castes".⁴³

Aristotle, a student of Plato, is known to have also studied at the Academy under Eudoxus of Knidos, the great mathematician and astronomer who spent sixteen months in Egypt shaving his head in order to study with the priests.⁴⁴ In Aristotle's *Metaphysika*, he argued that the Egyptians had created the caste system and hence "Egypt was the cradle of mathematics because the caste of priests were given great leisure, schole".⁴⁵ According to Aristotle, the priests had invented the *mathematikai technai* (mathematical arts), which included geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy, which the Greeks were beginning to possess.⁴⁶

According to Bernal (1987, p.109), Aristotle's admiration for Egypt went beyond that of Herodotus because while the latter believed that Egyptians had developed geometry, the key science, for practical reasons to measure land after landmarks had been washed away by the Nile flood—Aristotle maintained that it had been developed theoretically by the priests.

Regarding the attitude of the Church Fathers towards Egypt, Bernal shows that after the crushing of Neo-Platonism, the Hellenic,

pagan descendants of Egyptian religion, and Gnosticism, its Judeo-Christian counterpart, christian thinkers tamed Egyptian religion by turning it into a philosophy. The process was identified with the figure of Hermes Trismegistos, a euphemized or rationalised version of Thot, the Egyptian God of wisdom. The church Fathers were divided on whether or not Trismegistos antedated Moses and Biblical moral philosophy. It was claimed that Saint Augustine's weighty opinion came down firmly in favour of the priority, and hence the superiority of Moses and the Bible. Following the classical tradition, however, the Fathers were united in the belief that the Greeks had learned most of their philosophy from the Egyptians (Bernal, 1987, p. 24).

III

In view of the foregoing, which clearly demonstrates the indebtedness of Western philosophy and Science to Ancient Egypt, how can one possibly understand the tragic conclusions of African Book philosophers (Hountondji, Towa, Wiredu, etc.) that abandoning one's cultural past seems to be the best way to gain the "Secret of the West?"

Let us for the sake of argument agree with this group that the intellectual pursuit of Western science and technology should be Africa's main task, it is important to recognize that:

- (a) Science and technology cannot thrive in a vacuum, that is, in an absence of a metaphysical framework;
- (b) Starting from traditional African culture, there is a need to build a bridge to connect Africa's cultural heritage with Ancient Egypt so as to provide that much needed metaphysics which will enable the move towards a scientific culture in Africa.

Items (a) and (b) will provide the foundations on which the unity of thought can be built in the African continent. This is to say that a systematic reconstruction of the African worldview or its philosophy cannot be complete, it will ever remain suspended in the air over unnecessary debates on method, until African scholars dare to connect their multiple forms of cultures or ethno-philosophies with Ancient Egyptian thought. Our position needs to be appraised in the light of, for example, Cheikh Anta Dipo's thesis that the "African historian who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective, nor unruffled; he is ignorant, cowardly, and neurotic".⁴⁸ Imagine, if you can, the uncomfortable position of a Western historian who was to write the history

of Europe, without according to Diop, "referring to the Greco-Latin Antiquity and try to pass that off as a scientific approach".⁴⁹

The position we have tried to argue so far in the paper is that two options are now open to African philosophers. First, if we accept that Western philosophy was influenced by Egyptian thought and that the Greeks took from Egypt what they needed to restructure their society and in the process "discover the intellect", African "Book Philosophers" can borrow a leaf from the Greeks. Given that over three millennia have passed since the evolution of what is now called Western philosophy, it becomes an almost impossible task to reacclurate what the West borrowed from Africa without running the risk of completing the cultural as well as intellectual assimilation of Africa by the West—the unfortunate legacy of the African colonial experience. The question, therefore, becomes: to what extent can you call the fruit of such a philosophy African? Perhaps the answer lies in the second option, which is to say that in acquiring from the West what Egypt had shared with it (cosmogony and science), there is the need to rearticulate what is acquired in the African metaphysic. For instance, there is the frequently quoted passage in "*Epinomis*" by Plato that whatever the Greeks acquired from foreigners (Egyptians) is finally turned by them into something finer. (Bernal 1987, p. 198). Similarly, as the popular writer Oliver Goldsmith wrote - in his 1774 *History of the Earth* strikingly paraphrasing *Epinomis*: "Those arts which might have had their invention among other races of mankind have come to their perfection in Europe".⁵⁰

There is no doubt that Pythagorean mathematics, Platonic Idealism, the theory of four elements of Thales of Miletus are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science. However, on the one hand their evolution in the West stripped them (because of the materialistic tendencies in the western culture), of the religious, idealistic shell in which the Egyptians had enveloped them. On the other hand, the West has advanced moral values diametrically opposite to Egyptian moral values which was based on special collectivism, optimism, relatively easy peaceful life, once it had been regulated by a few social laws — a Dionysian approach to life.

It can further be argued that what the West borrowed from Egypt was either what their Egyptian teachers (the priests and scholars) were willing to secularize, what is probably with a few exceptions already apparent in the culture, or what these scholars particularly found appealing to complete their intellectual formation.

To illustrate the point we are trying to make, it is common

knowledge that library information contained in textbooks and other educational materials are often available to whoever wants to consult them. Major discoveries in the sciences even when they are under patent, can be used in the classroom to educate students. But this is not to say that once you know the basics that one can go ahead to manufacture the products. There is still the essential component(s) which the owners of the patent(s) keep to themselves. These "essentials" are not for public consumption and are only available on a franchise or guarded by the owners. This is to say that the release of such "information" depends on the extent to which it does not jeopardize the interests, the national pride or security of the owners. By parity of reasoning one can draw an analogy that what the Greeks and medieval scholars got from Egypt was what the custodians of that cosmogony and science were willing to secularize and release to their students. That which was under "patent" and guarded jealously by the priests were the "essentials" of Egyptian wisdom. Since these essentials were couched in the African psyche, it is the task of African philosophers to attempt to decipher its content so as to justify whatever claim Africa has on Ancient Egypt. This will also provide the metaphysical framework under which whatever is reacculturated from the West and other cultures would find its perfection.

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22. Lansana Keita (1986) "Contemporary African Philosophy" p.113.
23. cf. Kwame Nkueuma. *Conciencism* Heinemann 1964, Panaf Books London (1970); Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa* (Essays on Socialism) OUP 1968.
24. Nyerere (1970) p. 9.
25. Peter Bodunrin "Which Kind of Philosophy for Africa " in *Philosophy in the Present Situation of Africa*, Alwin Diemer (ed.), 1978, p. 9.
26. Pauline Hountondji, *Sur la "Philosophie Africaine"* (1977) Paris, p. 49
27. Marcien Towa, *Essai Sur la Problematique Philosophique dans l'Afrique Actuelle Yaounde, Cameroon, 1971*, p. 4.
28. "Nous devons nourrir a l'egard de tout culte de la difference et de l'indentite une mefiance systematique; Sans quoi nous courrons le risque de nous confirmer dans la servitude;" (Towa, *L'Idee d'une philosophie negro - africaine*. Yaounde, Cameroon, 1979, p. 67).
29. cf. Barnabas C. Okolo, *What is African Philosophy?* 1987, Freeman Press, Enugu, Nigeria p. 28.
30. Wiredu J.E. " "How not to Compare African Thought with Western Thought" in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, Richard Wright ed. University Press of America. (1979) p. 140.
31. *Ibid.* p.142.
32. *Ibid.* p.142.
33. cf. Martin Bernal. *Black Athena* p. 176.
34. *Ibid.* p. 142. See also, Albright, W.F. (1968) *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, London, Athlone, p. 225; Baumgarten A.J. (1981) *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Comentary*, Leiden: Brill pp. 108-119.
35. Martin Bernal. *Black Athena* p. 143.
36. Amelineau, *Prolegomenes, a' l'etude de la Religion Egyptieene*, Paris: ed. Leroux., 1916, Introduction p. 8-9. Quoted in Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization : Myth or Reality*, Lawrence Hill and Company. (1974, p. 232).
37. *Ibid.* p. 232.
38. cf. *Isokrates (1928 - 44)*, 3 Vols. 1 and 2 trans. G.Norlin; 3 trans. L. Van Hook. Cambridge Mass.: Loeb. Quoted in Martin Bernal (1987) *Black Athena* (1987, p. 104)
39. Isokrates, *Bousiris*, 28, p. 119.
40. Plato. *Phaedrus*, 274 D (trans. H.N. Fowler, P. 363). Quoted in Martin Bernal (1987, p. 106)
41. Philebus, 16C; Epinomis, 986E-987A. Quoted in Martin Bernal, (1987, p. 106).
42. Cited in Proklos, In *Tim LXXVI* trans. Festugiere, 1966-8; vol. 1.p. 111; Quoted in Martin Bernal (1987, p. 106).
43. Karl Marx, *Kapital* 3 Vol. 1 pt. 4, Hamburg 1987, trans. from the 4th German Edition by E. and C. Paul with an Introduction by G.D.H. Cole (1983 edition, p. 299).

44. cf. Diogenes Laertius, VIII, 86-9; Santrillana (1963, pp.813-15); Quoted in M. Bernal (1987, p. 108).
45. Aristotle, *Metaphysika*, 1.1.981b; Quoted in M. Bernal (1987, p. 108).
46. *De Caelo*, 11.14.298a; Quoted in M. Bernal (1987, p. 108).
47. Martin Bernal (1987, p. 109); See also Froidefond, C. (1971) *Le Mirage Egyptien dans la litterature Grecque d'Homere a Aristote*, Paris Ophrys.
48. Cheikh Anta diop. *The African Origin of Civilization*, (1974, p.XIV).
49. *Ibid.* p. XIV.
50. Goldsmith, O. (1774) *History of the Earth*, vol. 2; London pp. 2301; Quoted in Bernal (1987, p. 198).

PROF. G.R. MALKANI ESSAY COMPETITION

Essays are invited for the Prof. G.R.Malkani Essay Competition either in English or Hindi from undergraduate or post-graduate students below the age of 25 years studying in any Indian educational institution on the theme "Secularism in Indian Context" for the First and Second prizes to be awarded respectively of Rs.200/-and Rs.100/- to the essays adjudicated to be so by a panel of referees appointed for the purpose. The prize-winning essays would be published in course of time either in Students' Supplement of the *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* or *Parāmarsá (Hindi)*, quarterly journals published by the Department. The conditions governing submission of essays for the competition are as follows:

1. The essay typed in double space on one side of the paper must be submitted in duplicate.
2. The essay must not be longer than 2500 words.
3. The essay must be accompanied by a certificate signed by the Head of the Institution/Department where the student is studying to the effect that
 - (a) the student is studying in that institution and is below the age of 25 years, and
 - (b) the essay is written by him/her.
4. The essays should reach Dr. Mangala R. Chinchore, Philosophy Department, Poona University, Ganeshkhind, Pune 411 007 not later than 31.5.1992.
5. The decision of the panel of referees shall be binding on all the competitors and no correspondence of any kind would be entertained on the count.

The Head,
Philosophy Department
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