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How Do We Construct Ontology Within a Particular Culture?

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In this short conversation, I engaged L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya's article titled 'Between the Ontology and Logic Criteria of African philosophy' published in chapter seven of *Method, Substance, and the Future of African Philosophy*. I will spot the key contributions of the paper and engage them critically with the objective of deconstructing and reconstructing the weak point to give way for new vistas of thought. Finally, I put forward 'questioning cultural experience' as criterion for African philosophy to rebut Ogbonnaya's Ontology criterion for African philosophy. My method will be conversational.

Introduction

There are several questions that have confronted African philosophy with the end of the Great Debate. These include issues such as: the language question, the question of criterion of African philosophy, etc. A number of scholars have addressed the language question in African philosophy ranging from Chris Uroh (1994), Francis Ogunmodede (1998), Ngugi Wa'Thiong'o (2005), Alena Rettova (2007), Godfrey Tangwa (2017), Chukwueloka Uduagwu (2017).

They all attempt to resolve the language problem in African philosophy. After that the criterion for African philosophy became another fundamental question for African philosophy. These questions have been addressed by scholars such as Odera Okura (1975), Sophie Oluwole (1989), Paulin Hountondji (1996), Peter Bodunrin (1991), Innocent Onyewuenyi (1991), Uduma Oji Uduma (2014), Jonathan Chimakonam (2015a; 2015b) and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya (2018).

As an ambassador of Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP), it is my duty to critically but creatively interrogate and reconstruct the existing positions in African philosophy by seasoned and potential African philosophers to build a systemic Africa philosophy as an academic discipline. I will in this article subject Ogbonnaya's essay to the crucial test of conversational philosophy.

Ogbonnaya's Submission to the Criterion Question of African Philosophy

One of the issues that are yet to be settled in African philosophy today is the question of criterion or what makes African philosophy 'African'. Many scholars like Hountondji, Odera Oruka, Bodunrin, Wiredu, Uduma, Chimakonam and so on have address this problem. However, to best of knowledge the last to address this predicament is Ogbonnaya in the book, [Method, Substance, and the Future of African Philosophy Edited by Edwin Etieyibo]. The article that addresses the said question is titled 'Between the Ontology and Logic Criterion of African Philosophy in chapter seven of the book (133-143).

In the article, Ogbonnaya conversed with the logic criterion put forward by Chimakonam. Ogbonnaya explained that Chiamkonam's logic criterion holds that every philosophy is informed by it background logic (2018, 119). He further stressed that for Chimakonam, philosophy is therefore, a philosophy because it is the custodian of a given logic which

defines it (OGBONNAYA 2018, 119). Thus, what makes African philosophy African and philosophical is the African background logic.

However, Ogbonnaya, rebuts this conclusion that the Africanness of philosophy is defined by African background logic. His reason is that Chimakonam's conclusion is built on a wrong foundation and premise (2018, 120). Thus, he posits 'I do not share the sentiment of Chimakonam that African logic is the criterion of African philosophy (Ogbonnaya 2018, 121). Ogbonnaya, argues that it is not logic that defines philosophy, for him philosophy is logic, which Uduma affirms in his inaugural lecture.

Against this backdrop, Ogbonnaya, argues, that if one accepts that philosophy is logic, it becomes a contradiction for one to say that logic is a criterion for philosophy. He stressed that, if one says that logic is the criterion of philosophy, it is the same as saying that philosophy is that which defines logic or philosophy.

For him, this is a fallacy of begging the question (2018, 121). Ogbonnaya, concludes by saying that African philosophy is not determined by African logic; it is the same as African logic. Hence, African logic is African philosophy and not its criterion. His reason is that both logic and philosophy, which are concerned with the study or science of the nature of reality. This implies that logic and philosophy depend on ontology, which is a science of reality.

Considering an African Science of Reality

Thus, Ogbonnaya, posits ontology as a criterion for African philosophy. He argues that, it is ontology that defines both philosophy and logic and not logic as argued by Chimakonam (2018, 122). He explains that ontology is the science of reality, of which logic and philosophy seek to understand and explain its nature. For this reason, he asserts: 'ontology becomes the yardstick of defining or shaping a philosophy to understand this reality' (2018, 122).

My question is, how does ontology perform this function in philosophy? What element of ontology performs this magic? Ogbonnaya did not explain. He claims that ontology determines logic and defines its nature. How does ontology achieve this? These are the questions that I think Ogbonnaya needs to clarify.

Furthermore, Ogbonnaya, posits that African logic reflects African thought system, which in turn reflects African ontology. My challenge is, how does person's thought system link to their ontology? He did not explain but went on to conclude that African logic has its root in African ontology. He argues that, if a particular ontology is distinct from another ontology, its logic will also be distinct from the logic of the other ontology.

For him, ontology varies from culture to culture. The question is: how do we arrive at ontology of a particular people within their culture? Is it all aspects of culture that can yield ontology? How do you justify, the claim that it is a particular aspect of culture that is ontology? These are the questions I think, Ogbonnaya has not addressed.

The problem with Ogbonnaya's criterion is that, it fails to explain how ontology determines logic and defines its nature. What are the elements of this ontology that performs this magic

in philosophy? However, he states that culture yields philosophy, and that this particular aspect of culture is ontology. In other words, ontology is rooted in culture. Hence, ontology is by-product of culture. Thus, ontology is informed by its culture. If that is the case, ontology is realized when we question and interrogate this cultural experience. In line with this Ijiomah argues that a people's ontology and logic is excavated through questioning cultural experience of the people (2014).

When Philosophy and Ontology Blur With Culture

To sum it up, it is in the questioning of this cultural experience that the ontology of a particular people is discovered. If this is the case, questioning cultural experience becomes the yardstick of defining or shaping a philosophy as well as its ontology. This is quite different from Uduma's cultural background criterion. To my understanding, what Uduma meant here is that culture serve as a given in society.

Thus, you narrate or describe what is there without questioning or interrogating this culture. What is being described or narrated becomes the philosophy of the people. This is one of the reasons why professional philosophers refer to African philosophy as culture bound philosophy.

If we do not question these cultural experiences, we tend to remain at the level of ethnophilosophy, which professional philosophers like Wright, Bodunrin, etc have criticized. I wish to add that if cultural experience is not interrogated even ontology becomes a difficult task to achieve. It is in interrogating of African cultural experiences that African ontology is realized.

Thus, if African culture forms the background of African ontology, African ontology cannot be the criterion for African philosophy. Rather, it is the questioning of African cultural experience that becomes a criterion for African philosophy. K.C. Anyanwu also notes that cultural experience is what makes philosophy of a given people, African. He argues that philosophy depends on cultural experience and attempts to interpret the experience by means of thought (1984, 83).

However, Anyanwu's position was more of interpretations of this cultural experience which may lead to hermeneutics which is not really the interrogation of cultural experience as I propose. Someone may ask: how do we interrogate cultural experience without some form of interpretation of such cultural experience?

It is important to note that interrogation is different from interpretation, hence, interpretation gives meaning to the subject matter in question while interrogation or questioning does not give meaning to the subject matter. Rather, it raises questions on the subject matter. An attempt to interrogate does not lead to interpretation as one might be tempted to believe.

Therefore, my emphasis is on the interrogation of this cultural experience to sieve out the philosophical elements within it. Through this interrogation, the logic, ontology and philosophy of a particular people are constructed. Thus, interrogating cultural experience becomes the yardstick or criterion for African philosophy.

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