

Conversational Philosophy as a New School of Thought in African Philosophy: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of ›Philosophical Space‹¹

Abstract

In the aftermath of the great debate in African philosophy, questions have been asked which triggered what we would call post-debate disillusionments. One such question posed to the advocates of Philosophical Universalism who ridiculed ethnophilosophy is: having disestablished the episteme of what they ridiculed as ethnophilosophy, what do they offer in its place? The second question posed to both the advocates of Philosophical Universalism and Philosophical Particularism² is: in the absence of any other point to debate about and in the absence of any commonly accepted episteme, what constitutes the concern and the future direction of African philosophy now? The fact that none of the two schools had any definite answers to these questions created unexpected disillusionments which saw many who had expended great intellectual energy during the debate silently exit the stage of African philosophy. One of our goals in this essay shall be sketching a brief outline of systematic African philosophy. In doing this, we shall show how the conversational school has evolved as a new school of thought that takes phenomenological³ issues as its con-

¹ I wish to heartily thank Prof. Olatunji A. Oyeshile of the University of Ibadan and V. C. A. Nweke of the University of Calabar for reading through the initial draft of this essay. Their critical commentaries have been very helpful in producing the current version of this essay. I thank them immensely.

² I have employed the categories ›Philosophical Universalism‹ and ›Philosophical Particularism‹ in the same senses Edwin Etieyibo first employed them. Whatever does not completely fall into one can be regarded as a member of both. See E. Etieyibo, ›Post-Modern Thinking and African Philosophy,‹ *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, Vol. 3, No 1, 2014, pp. 67–82.

³ Throughout this essay I have employed the derivative ›phenomenological‹ thirteen times and in two related senses: 1. To refer to issues that are present in the lifeworld or in the day-to-day experiences of a people e.g. ›phenomenological issues/concerns‹ and, 2. To refer to a method that seeks through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of experience, e.g. ›phenomenological engage-

cern in the contemporary period. Understandably, the promise of this new school shall be the centerpiece of this essay as we engage Bruce Janz in a conversation on the concept of »philosophical space.« Our methods shall be evaluative, critical and prescriptive.

Keywords

Conversational philosophy, conversational, conversationalism, African philosophy, space, place, Bruce Janz.

1 Introduction

I have argued elsewhere that the history of African philosophy began with frustration⁴ that inexorably generated angry questions and then responses and reactions that then initially manifested in nationalist and ideological thoughts and excavations. Here, I wish to strengthen that claim and advance the notion that not only the history of African philosophy, but what I label systematic African philosophy, itself started from the springboard of frustration. Evidently as I argued elsewhere, the frustration was borne out of a colonial caricature of Africa as culturally naïve, intellectually docile, and rationally inept (2015: 9).⁵ These developments are not without some consequences. Beginning with the identity crisis of the African, the African's place in history as well as the African's contributions to civilization, later developments were to question the rationality of the African. All of these speculations coupled with the humiliating effect of slavery, colonialism, and racialism instigated an angry frustration against the treacherous colonial system in the returnee African scholars. As a result, animosity and frustration with the colonial episteme naturally

ment.« My main motive for employing this concept to describe the nature of conversational philosophy is to contrast my proposal for contemporary African philosophy with ethnographic and, most importantly, with the dry analysis and meta-philosophy of the Universalist school. It is to my graduate student, V. C. A. Nweke who drew my attention to the importance of this clarification that I owe my gratitude.

⁴ J. O. Chimakonam, »History of African Philosophy,« *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Nov. 22, 2014, J. Fieser, and B. Dowden (eds) (retrieved, March 1, 2015). Paragraph 1.

⁵ J. O. Chimakonam, »Dating and Periodization Questions in African Philosophy,« *Atuolu Omalu: Some Unanswered Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy*, J. Chimakonam (ed.), Lanham: University Press of America, 2015.

took shape. Thus began the history of systematic African philosophy with nationalist and ideological constructions. I have clarified that it was the frustration of the returnee African scholars that first led them into systematic philosophizing and that still leads some African philosophers to this day – Africa, being a continent in turmoil (2014: 325).⁶ But I have stated this without also gainsaying the place and presence of »wonder« in the philosophical activities of African philosophers of today (*ibid.*).

In an earlier writing, I have delineated the history of African philosophy into two broad categorizations – to wit, the Pre-systematic and the Systematic. The former refers to Africa's philosophical culture, thoughts of anonymous African thinkers, and may include the problematic⁷ of Egyptian legacy. The latter refers to the period marking the return of Africa's first eleven or Western-tutored philosophers⁸ spanning from the 1920s to the modern day (Chimakonam 2015: 12). This latter category could further be delineated into four periods, namely:

1. Early period: 1920s-1960s
2. Middle period: 1960s-1980s
3. Later period: 1980s-1990s
4. New (contemporary) Era: 1990s- till today.

⁶ J. O. Chimakonam, »A Brief History of African Philosophy: From Frustration to Reflection,« *The Mirror of Philosophy*, G. O. Ozumba, and K. A. Ojong (eds.), Uyo: El-Johns Publishers, 2014.

⁷ The Egyptian legacy which refers to the ancient Egyptian thought is regarded as problematic in the history of African philosophy because there is widespread disagreement with regards to the veracity of the claim that Egyptian philosophy was African philosophy and that ancient Egyptians were black Africans. Cf. C. S. Momoh (ed.), »Issues in African Philosophy,« *The Substance of African Philosophy*, Auch: African Philosophy Projects' Publications, 2000, pp. 74–102; G. James, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1954; I. Onyewuenyi, *African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentrism*, Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1993; C. B. Okolo, *Problems of African Philosophy*, Enugu: Cecta Nigeria Press, 1990; C. M. Okoro, *African Philosophy: Question and Debate, A Historical Study*, Enugu: Paqon Press, 2004, etc.

⁸ The Western-tutored African philosophers or those whom I call the first eleven African philosophers are those initial Africans who traveled outside of the colonies to Britain, France, and America to obtain Western education. This was during colonialism and prior to political independence. Some notable examples include, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Amílcar Carbral, to name a few. Akin Makinde refers to them as philosophers of first orientation (2000: 105), cf. his »Philosophy in Africa,« in (2000: 103–129).

It would however be mistaken to attempt to distribute individual African philosophers among these periods strictly and without yielding ground for overlaps. The reason for this is the dire circumstances of the time, hence:

This history [of African philosophy], it is important to remark, is a very short one! It is also to the chagrin of a dedicated reader, a very dense one, since actors sought to do in a few decades what would have been better done in many centuries, and as a result, they also did in later years what ought to have been done earlier and vice versa, thus making the early and the middle epochs overlap considerably (*ibid.*: 9).

But the obvious overlapping of periods, or the actors in periods, as explained in the preceding quote, should pose no structural defect in our delineation above, provided that the focus of each epoch is clearly marked out and that the actors are properly linked up, as we have done.

It is important to clarify also that the delineation of systematic African philosophy does not commit us to saying that before the early period people in Africa never philosophized – they did. But one fact that must not be denied is that they did not document their thoughts, and as such, we cannot attest to their systematicity.⁹ Although my idea of systematicity appears to make explicit allusion to written culture, I shall nonetheless include all forms of modern documentation systems, electronic or otherwise that are open to retrieval by any individual among valid forms of systematic philosophy. I shall however exclude any form of oral literature that is not documented in written or electronic systems from this category. To me, this latter category, including some written literary works that are mere narratives of traditional culture, are not different from folklore generally tied to

⁹ I am not unaware of the *ifa* literary corpus of the Yoruba people which, apparently dates back into time and which Sophie Oluwole, in a recent work (*Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*, Lagos: Ark Publishers, 2014), has attempted to elevate to a rigorous philosophical status. I simply doubt their philosophical rigor. They read like poetry and are at best comparable to the works of Homer and Hesiod, two important ancient Greek poets. Also, my brilliant graduate student V. C. A. Nweke has drawn my attention to the fact that ancient inscriptions on bones and all sorts of stone and wooden engravings could pass for documentations which might vitiate my claim that documentation was necessary for systematicity. I find it more convenient however to regard such carvings of symbols as art rather than writing, considering the fact that proper writing (apart from sign carvings) had not developed in the sub-Saharan Africa during antiquity.

the uncanny mind of the community or what Kwasi Wiredu would call »community thought« (Wiredu 1980: 14).¹⁰ I do not say that an oral literature cannot be philosophical, but rather that a proper construction of philosophical systems requires, as a minimum, that expressed thoughts refer to definite individuals who enjoy credit and bear responsibility. When philosophers agree or disagree; when they argue for or against, it is usually in reaction to an identifiable ›other.‹ In the absence of written or any alternate form of documentation, oral literature is lost as an unknown voice in the shadow of darkness. Even if what is anonymously expressed appears intelligible, it is too dangerous to place such a thought as another brick in the rising architectionic structure of African philosophy, because when such a thought is breached as is usually the case in philosophy, there would be no one to take responsibility. It is in this connection that Alena Rettova writes that emphasis is placed on written literature over oral because it has several qualities central to the project of philosophy which oral literature lacks, for one; writing establishes a connection to the individual authors, which is central to the practice of philosophy (Rettova 2007: 41, footnote 9).¹¹ Therefore, what the above periodization shows is that African philosophy, as a written and or documented system, first began in the late 1920s.

Furthermore, I denied the Egyptian legacy any important place in my periodization, because even if the philosophers of stolen legacy were able to prove a connection between Greece and Egypt, they could not prove in concrete terms that Egyptians were black Africans or that black Africans were Egyptians.¹² The frustration and desperation represented above that motivated such ambitious efforts in the ugly colonial era are understandable. But any reasonable person, judging by the responses of time and events in the last few decades, knows that it is high time that Africans abandoned that unproven legacy and let go of that now useless propaganda.

In light of these historical insights, I shall discuss in the next section, the mainstay of African philosophy as a systematic study. I shall trace its origin, progress and future concerns, one of which is

¹⁰ K. Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

¹¹ A. Rettova, *Afrophone Philosophies: Reality and Challenge*, Stredokluky: Zdenek Susa, 2007.

¹² Cf. James (1954); I. Onyewuenyi (1993).

conversational philosophy. Thereafter, I shall discuss the inauguration of conversational philosophy which had taken place in a previous essay. The discussion here shall focus more on the conceptualization of conversation in philosophy, its promise as a philosophical movement/school, and the power of its approach. After this, I shall discuss the canons of conversational philosophy. These canons shall be presented in form of quality assurance in order to guard against certain problems of philosophizing in Africa today such as lack of rigor, apathy to criticism, the predominance of description over prescription, transliteration, over-modernization, apathy to modernization, etc. Finally, in the conclusion, I shall engage Janz more deeply in an attempt to discern the importance of the concept of philosophical space in the project of African philosophy more clearly.

2 African Philosophy as a Systematic Study

As a systematic study, African philosophy began in the 1920s. This implies that what lay behind, besides being ethnophilosophical, could be regarded as pre-systematic. In the systematic era, we have had the first three periods laying the important foundation that provides the direction for new developments in African philosophy. However, the early, middle, and later periods also suffer from three prominent distractions in the systematic era (1920s-1980s) before the emergence of the contemporary period in the 1990s. These are: 1) the burden of justification, which led to 2) the proliferation of perverse dialogue, and 3) culminated in the production of philosophical nationalism¹³ rather than platial thought, which according to Janz refers to a properly constituted philosophical tradition that attends to the conditions in which its questions arise (2009: 2, 12).¹⁴ This is not to suggest that African philosophy from those periods, despite being greatly short-changed in its focus, has no significance in the history of African philosophy. It is evidently systematic, critical, and rigorous in orien-

¹³ Cf. Chimakonam (2015: xii). Here I conceive of philosophical nationalism as the pattern of thought which demonstrates sympathy toward reclaiming in geography, theme, and personality that which is believed to be truly African. Janz describes it as spatial philosophy, a description I am not comfortable with because it tends to invite confusion with a positively interesting concept of »philosophical space.« See his essay »African Philosophy: Some Basic Questions« in the same volume (2015: 133).

¹⁴ B. Janz, *Philosophy in an African Place*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009.

tation. Above all else, actors were able to clear the air during the debate and their contributions will remain central to the future development of the discipline. But it has its low points too. African philosophy in the first three periods – namely early, middle, and later – was not phenomenological as such; rather it was more meta-philosophical.¹⁵ The bulk of this meta-philosophical activity was about finding a place and from there a space for African philosophy. But Janz cautions by saying that although there are still some doubters out there, there must come a time when one realizes that everyone that is going to be persuaded has already been, and that it is time to move past the attempts at self-justification (Janz 2009: 146). This strengthens the claim that in the first three periods, actors did not address substantive philosophical issues and that they did not engage to a very large extent in fruitful conversations on issues that would seek to unveil the African lifeworld in the light of philosophy. What stood out was the burden of justification as to whether African philosophy existed or not, a proliferation of a perverse dialogue concerning who was petty, biased, racist, or myopic, and a blind effort to recover and reclaim certain historical artifacts – what Janz calls »spatial philosophy« and what he encourages us to deride (Janz 2015: 133). He clearly captures the tension thus:

There is another significant tension. One might distinguish between African philosophy as a spatial or a platial activity. African philosophy is spatial when it thinks of itself as analogous to a country on a map, and sets out to reclaim intellectual territory that was appropriated in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century by European thinkers. It defines its borders, establishes citizenry, and defends the »country« against invaders. African philosophy is »platial« when it focuses on phenomenological analysis, that is, when it explicates the meaning of an African life – world for Africans. A platial understanding works out what it means to live in a country (that is, what it means to connect practice and thought in an African context). To the extent that one fights the defensive battle imposed or implied by European thought as it dismisses African philosophy as legitimate, one is engaging in spatial thought. While these battles may be necessary, what makes African philosophy a vital and urgent pursuit for many people is not the spatial response to an external challenge, but rather the explication of meaningful lived experience (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ Meta-philosophy generally refers to the inquiry into the nature of philosophy itself, a kind of philosophy of philosophy and which includes the aims, scope, and methods of philosophy.

Evidently, the burden of the schools that thrived in the early, middle, and the later periods – namely ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, professional school, hermeneutic school and the literary school – was highly spatial according to Janz's preferred terminology but was more nationalist according to my own view. In a later section, I shall engage Janz more deeply in a conversational encounter (Section 5).

What I wish to put forward in this section is a thesis corroborating Janz's discourse on the proper concern of African philosophy in this age. The campaign is seamlessly the same. We must move beyond apologies and initiate a series of conversations that are phenomenological. African philosophy must aim at reaching an Archimedean point – the establishment of a veritable philosophical place from which it can engage contextual, phenomenological issues, as well as other philosophical places. This is what shall characterize African philosophy as a systematic study. In broaching this elevated use of the term ›systematic‹, there is no intention of discrediting the activities of the early, middle, and later periods. They are by no means less systematic. The difference however is, as the tools of philosophy are employed to address the burden of philosophy justifying itself in the three prior periods, little room was created to allow the tools to be applied to other more substantive concerns. Thus, there was a constricted use of philosophical tools in the three prior periods. A question that must be asked is: what is the best form of ›philosophical unveiling‹? Is it when the tools of philosophy are used to assess philosophy itself (meta-philosophical concerns) or when they are employed in assessing other phenomenological concerns of philosophy? The latter is evidently more plausible without diminishing the importance of the former. This is because philosophers may continually discuss their discipline in different modes but they do not earn special accolades by asking metaphilosophical questions such as: what constitutes philosophy? That may be an important question in a first-year philosophy class and indeed in any gathering of philosophers, but by no means in any system-building philosophical enterprise. The burden of justification, which constituted the philosophical center of the three prior periods, can be reduced to that sort of philosophy-questioning-philosophy mode of thought. On the other hand, philosophers are expected to ask questions about other definitive concerns of society, hence they are rightly regarded as society's gadflies.

One problem that could be associated with this philosophy-questioning-philosophy mode of thought is that the tools of philosophy

remain frozen within the circumference of thought itself, whereas ideally, these tools of thought ought to be freed up in phenomenological engagements. It is the liberal manifestation of thought in the activity of critical discourses on issues that touch human society that we call philosophizing. The philosopher analogously becomes the one who has taken his critical mindset far afield. The philosopher sticks their nose into the businesses of other disciplines; raising questions about what many take for granted and unveiling the underlying meanings of reality, some of which go on to have immense implications for life in the society. This philosophical energy is very vital to a society's development that it would be considered wasted for such energy to be dissipated entirely on discussions pertaining to philosophy's status rather than on the intricate nature of reality. This was what the era of debate pursued almost fruitlessly even though it did so in a systematic manner.

Thus, it is not a given that any philosophical activity that is systematic is progressive, or even desirable by virtue of being systematic. By systematic I mean something simple, namely any philosophical activity (properly documented in a human language) that diligently employs the tools of philosophy in drawing its conclusions. The schools in the early, middle, and later periods (ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, hermeneutic and the universalist schools with the exception of the nationalist/ideological school) were variously systematic in their processes, but in my opinion they failed to some extent in completely decentralizing the philosophical tools through critical engagements with the substantive issues that trouble Africa. In other words, being or reality remained partly frozen in these periods. In the absence of any critical fire directed to Being, it stayed at peace within the African context. Clearly unperturbed, Being in African philosophy could not unfold itself during these periods. In no way does this bear good testament to a culture of philosophy. The activity of philosophizing must primarily disquiet Being. It is in the struggle between word and Being that different phenomenological visions of ontology are unveiled. It is in this that philosophy fulfills its obligations to society and pays its debt in the manner that Janz often cites of Jacques Derrida (*ibid.*: 145).¹⁶ To actualize this, philosophy must con-

¹⁶ Janz strongly believes that for African philosophy to grow it must divert attention from fruitless debates and focus on substantive issues that touch on society's problems.

front the norms, the laws, the beliefs, and the various pillars of society. This critical dis-centering of Being often creates a room for new synthesis to emerge which continues to reshape and reorganize society from time to time. This was clearly lacking in the philosophical activities of the schools that thrived in the first three periods of African philosophy. Much of what they did could be summed up as merely talking *about* African philosophy.

It is probably much easier to talk about African philosophy than it is to *do* African philosophy. This is why Godwin Sogolo chides members of the Universalist school who criticize traditional philosophy saying, »it is one thing to point out errors and omissions in what they condemn as African philosophy and it is quite another thing to produce a credible alternative. They may have done the former but surely not the latter« (1988: 111).¹⁷ Thus if African philosophy in this contemporary era is to develop and find ways of unfolding reality, actors must switch gears and begin doing African philosophy, since according to Wiredu, more than enough time has already been devoted to talking about African philosophy, it is high time to get on with the task itself (1980: xi). In different milieus of African philosophy during recent times, phenomenological visions of reality are being unveiled to signal a new direction in African philosophy. For me therefore, Pantaleon Iroegbu's »Uwa Ontology,« Mogobe Ramose's systematized »Ubuntu Ontology,« Innocent Asouzu's »Complementary Ontology,« Ozumba-Chimakonam's »Integrativist Ontology« and Ada Agada's »Consolationist Ontology« are all examples of attempts to disquiet Being in the new era of African philosophy. One common trait linking these sources is that they follow, at least to some degree, the pattern of conversational philosophy. Some scholars have muted the idea of conversations in African philosophy. For example Jennifer Lisa Vest suggests a switch from a perverse dialogue to a necessary one, where her use of dialogue captures our meaning of conversation (Vest 2009:23).¹⁸ Janz, to my knowledge, was the first to employ the term in the technical sense as I use it in this essay. He highlights the importance of conversational engagements in the fu-

¹⁷ G. Sogolo, »African Philosophers and African Philosophy,« *Second Order* (New Series), Vol. 1, No. 1, 1988, pp. 109–113.

¹⁸ J. L. Vest, »Perverse and Necessary Dialogues in African Philosophy,« *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK)*, New Series, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 2009, pp. 1–23.

ture development of African philosophy (2009: 148). A few other scholars here and there have been known to employ the term in talking about potential future inquiries in African philosophy.¹⁹ In this essay, we explore conversational philosophy as a new wave of thought in African philosophy and as the very crest upon which the contemporary period rides.

3 Inaugurating the Conversational School²⁰

To converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information (*cf.* Smith 2004: 285).²¹ Here, we employ the term in a slightly more technical sense. Philosophical conversation for us is not a mere informal exchange of ideas or a simple informal dialogue between two interlocutors; it is rather a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones. By conversational philosophy we mean that type of philosophical engagement between individual thinkers with

¹⁹ F. Ochieng'-Odiambo, R. Burton, and E. Brandon (eds.), *Conversations in Philosophy: Crossing the Boundaries*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008. This book appears to have been appropriately titled, even though there is no chapter that addresses conversations concerning a possible future direction of African philosophy. What the editors pointed out however was the need for conversations to ensue among world philosophies in the understanding that reason is a common human heritage. Muiyiwa Falaiye is another scholar who has employed the term conversations in African philosophy in a rather technical sense (*cf.* F. Muiyiwa, »Transmitting Philosophic Knowledge without Writing: The Ekiti-Yoruba Philosophic Sagacity Experience,« *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2005, pp. 55–74). However, he represents a neo-Orukan dynasty. His own understanding and use of the term advances Oruka's approach to philosophic sagacity where a professional philosopher holds a conversation with a village sage. Perhaps, it was Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) that first employed the term »conversation« in the sense I already attributed to Oruka. That is not the sense in which we employ it in this essay. For an example of our sense of the term, see Chimakonam (2015: xiv–xv, 28–34).

²⁰ A little conceptual clarification is called for here. Conversational philosophy is what I call the school; conversational refers to the movement aimed at advancing the idea of conversational philosophizing, while conversationalism refers to the method. I wish for readers and commentators to maintain consistency in the usage of these three concepts.

²¹ S. Smith (ed.), *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language: Encyclopedic Edition*, Florida: Trident Press, 2004.

one another, on phenomenological issues of concern, or on one another's thoughts where thoughts are unfolded from concepts or from concepts of concepts.²² Conversational philosophy is therefore more than a dialogue; it is an encounter between proponents and opponents, or a proponent and an opponent engaged in contestations and protestations of ideas and thoughts. A conversational school therefore would be any circle of like-minded philosophers who adopt this approach in their practice of philosophy. For me, this should now define not only the new era of African philosophy but also the practice of philosophy in our age generally.

The New Era or Contemporary Period of African philosophy necessarily emerged out of the disillusionment of the post-debate era. The post-debate disillusionment occurred at a time when philosophical particularism²³ (traditional philosophy) had been completely discouraged and philosophical universalism (professional philosophy) had grown out of fashion as a result of its failure to sustain hope and provide a new direction for African philosophy. It was a time when there was nothing more worth debating, and where there was no one worth debating with on the subject of the existence of African philosophy. Vest captures this disillusionment where she admonishes:

While engagement in perverse dialogues may have been necessary in the early formulations of African philosophy, there is no reason at this point for African philosophy to continue to allow their ubiquitous influence on it. By becoming aware of the tendency to engage in such dialogues by African philosophers in various schools of thought, we can approach our work more critically and refuse to engage in these preoccupations, thus freeing ourselves to pursue other more important subjects. Checking for perverse preoccupations should be one of the tests each new work in African philosophy is subjected to (Vest 2009: 21).

Attending to Vest's caution above is unarguably part of the focus of this essay. To actualize the vision of a new direction, we propose a

²² By concepts of concepts, I mean further interesting ideas or notions inspired by the discussion of particular concepts.

²³ Note however, that in the recent African philosophy literature the 'particular' has come to acquire two meanings, old and new. While the old can be fairly referred to as 'traditional philosophy,' the new refers to 'philosophy tradition.' The latter makes it possible for one to be an advocate of relative but universalizable systems of philosophy without being an advocate of traditional philosophy or, which is worse, 'ethno-philosophy.' My usage of the term 'particular' in this work shall dart between the two senses depending on the context.

conversational order in African philosophy. This entails promoting conversational philosophy as a new school of thought that characterizes the contemporary period of the discipline. In the early 1990s, some emerging scholars regarded conversational thinking on substantive issues as a new attraction in opposition to the outmoded 'orientation of perverse dialogue.' By the time of the new millennium this new orientation had begun to take shape. Among its pioneers are Pantaleon Iroegbu and much later, Innocent Asouzu. The conversational school has become the new school of thought to which all who esteem the interplay of rigorous engagements between African philosophers on relevant phenomenological issues belong. Conversational philosophy does not aim at interpreting traditional culture, even though it adopts an African mode of thought in its analyses as the usable past²⁴ or valuable past²⁵ or what I shall prefer to call 'relevant tradition,' which is relevant to the modern synthesis. I prefer the term 'relevant tradition' to the expressions preferred by Bogumil Jewsiewicki (usable past) and Janheinz Jahn (valuable past) because anybody can find any part of African culture usable or valuable irrespective of what he/she finds of interest. Again, the term 'past' does not properly refer to African culture of the pre-colonial era. 'Past' could mean a thousand years ago; it could also mean a day ago, which is quite confusing and unclear. The expression 'relevant tradition' on the other hand highlights the importance of taking only what is relevant in constructing modern philosophical syntheses and the term 'tradition,'²⁶ as we have employed it, appropriately designates pre-colonial African thought as it existed then and as it may still exist in the present through generational transfer.

Conversational philosophy does not blindly apply Western modes of thought in analyzing African issues. Actors must therefore note that by conversational philosophy, we do not mean critical engagements between African philosophers in a simplistic sense; we mean to say also that these tools of textual criticism, rigor, analysis, and the sundry modern philosophical tools we employ have been Africanized such that in applying them, we designate an African

²⁴ B. Jewsiewicki, 'African Historical Studies: Academic Knowledge as 'Usable Past' and Radical Scholarship,' *The African Studies Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1989, pp. 1–76.

²⁵ J. Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 16.

²⁶ For a multi-perspective interpretation of the term tradition, see the second chapter of Janz (2009: 37–62).

mode of thought. For example, critical analysis in African philosophy does not only imply fault-finding in order to deepen understanding, but in addition, it implies the idea of reconstruction. In other words, when we employ critical analysis in African philosophy, we aim in the final lap of the exercise to reconstruct faulty areas, not just to identify them. This is because the edifice of African episteme has yet to form a mountain, hence any part that is destroyed must be rebuilt. Thus, conversational is what I call the movement that thrives in this contemporary era. Presently, genuine conversations in African philosophy are taking place between some actors such as Pantaleon Iroegbu, Innocent Asouzu, Kwame Gyekye, Bruce Janz, Kwame Appiah, Jennifer Lisa Vest, Jonathan Chimakonam, Ada Agada, to name a few. By conversational philosophy I mean the rigorous engagement of individual African philosophers with one another, or their works, in the creation of critical narratives using an African mode of thought. Even though some works in this area, like those of Kwame Appiah, still fall short²⁷ of employing the African mode of thought, we can admit them once we view conversational philosophy as an evolving pattern of thought. On the whole, the conversational orientation clearly defines African philosophy as a platial enterprise commanding phenomenological preoccupations that do not lead to ethnophilosophy. As Janz points out:

The geography of philosophy does not lead to ethnophilosophy. Placing philosophy in a geography suggests that it has contingent but not arbitrary interest, that it responds to and shapes a particular set of conditions of reflection. It is the contention of this book that philosophy must attend to the conditions in which its questions arise, and that this attention does not diminish philosophy's traditional (although never completely fulfilled) striving for universals (Janz 2009: 2).

Thus, drawing from the above, we emphasize that conversational philosophy, though riding on the crest of an African mode of thought, is universalizable. Additionally, this emerging school thrives on fulfilling the yearning of the professional/modernist school to have a robust individual discourse while also thriving on fulfilling one of the convictions of the traditionalists that a thoroughgoing African philosophy has to be established upon the foundation of the African sys-

²⁷ It is probably because some of these actors have been immersed in Western thought through a stringent process of education that they could not or would not interpret reality otherwise.

tem of thought.²⁸ Conversationalists make the most of the criterion which presents African philosophy as a critical tradition projecting individual discourses from the system of thought of Africa. It is not plagued by the distractions of burden of justification, perverse dialogue, or philosophical nationalism. It neither aims to prove a point, nor does it seek to attack a group, nor does it strive to reclaim some territories or personalities; in conversing, it simply looks forward to the future unhindered by tradition and does not look backwards tied to the past. It is at the conversational level that substantive issues can be tackled in African philosophy. For example, Vest suggests:

Determining whether or not existing debates are perverse in origin can aid African thinkers in identifying debates that are necessary to the development of the discipline and not merely prompted by external representations and the need to reply to them. If there is a widespread belief in witches in many parts of Africa, perhaps a debate on the ontology of witchcraft is necessary, regardless of how it fits into existing discourses of primitive religions authored by Western writers. If there is a widespread belief in intimate ontological relationships between humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects, then perhaps an African metaphysician should explore this idea, regardless of how it might be disparaged by European thinkers who might classify such beliefs as animistic and therefore not worthy of investigation. Perhaps the ideas of important men and women ought to be studied by Sage philosophers whether or not they can be compared to the ideas of Socrates. Perhaps African languages ought to be studied for their epistemological insights regardless of whether similar insights can be found in Anglo-American Analytic investigations of language. Perhaps African philosophers ought to engage in intercultural dialogues with Asian, Native

²⁸ Perhaps the definite article »the« would be more appropriate in describing African system of thought because it eliminates pluralities that the indefinite article »an« would suggest. The African system of thought, as used in this work, thus refers to a common index that characterizes ontology in many African cultures – being as communitarian or complementary. That this common index exists has been supported in writing by the likes of Tempels Placid, John Mbiti, William Abraham, T. Uzodinma Nwala, C. B. Nze, Olusegun Oladipo, and Innocent Onyewuenyi to name but a few. Cf. W. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; P. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, Owerri: International Universities Press, 1995; L. Keita, »The African Philosophical Tradition,« R. A. Wright, (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, ³1984; J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969; U. Nwala Igbo *Philosophy*, London: Lantern Books, 1985; C. B. Nze, *Aspects of African Communalism*, Nigeria: Veritas Publication, 1989; I. Onyewuenyi, »Is There an African Philosophy,« *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, T. Serequeberhan (ed.), New York: Paragon House, 1991. pp. 29–46.

American and African American philosophers, and no longer focus all of their attention on Western interlocutors. Perhaps efforts such as these will lead to a definition by African philosophers of the Necessary Debates in their field (Vest 2009: 20).

Although above categorizations made by Vest are not as definite as one would wish, they nonetheless point clearly to their phenomenological status. It should be noted that by exploring the belief in witches, for example, Vest does not mean a description of a people's belief system concerning witches, which is exactly the same thing ethnophilesophers and some members of the literary and the hermeneutical schools would do. Vest refers to a rigorous and critical engagement of the ontology of witches, leading to both epistemological and metaphysical results.

Janz also explores what the focus of the conversational school in African philosophy should be as the discipline develops greater sophistication. Dwelling, as the ethnophilesophers and indeed other schools of thoughts have, on one form of distraction or another has become not only unfashionable but untenable. For him therefore:

I have argued that a great deal of effort has been expended in solidifying African philosophy's place in the philosophical world, and that this impulse, while important, does not exhaust the creative possibilities for African philosophy. In the coming decades, we can expect African philosophy to mature, by which I mean that it will find new conversations (other than primarily with Western philosophy); it will find ways of including groups that are currently under-represented (particularly women); it will further develop conversations among scholars themselves, rather than focusing on interpreting traditional culture or applying Western modes of thought to African issues; and it will include ›platial‹ rather than only ›spatial‹ philosophy in the sense I have described. African philosophy stands as both an important critical and reflective movement in world philosophy, and a contribution to the world of philosophy by working out how, in the words of Derrida, philosophy can honour its ›debts and duties‹ (Janz 2015: 144–145).

At a conversational level, the debt and duties of African philosophy would lie in addressing issues that touch upon Africa, whether in the present or potentially in the future. The method called conversationalism aims at employing reason in identifying problems in the study of substantive issues and proffering solutions in the form of new syntheses. Critical rigor and analytic engagements are also part of this discourse in which the African mode of thought is projected. The African mode of thought is a rational framework in which:

1. The opposite ends are not strictly regarded as contradictories, but as sub-contraries, 2. There is a possibility of a complementary synthesis of seemingly opposed variables, 3. That 1 and 2 above make the intermediate value possible through what is called ›truth-value glut.‹ Put simplistically, working by way of analogy, the African mode of thought considers life to be larger than logic with regards to the strict application of the law of contradiction and the principle of bivalence. A considerable dilution of the strict application of the classical laws of thought is manifest in the African mode of thought.²⁹ This dilution does not suggest the outright violation of the principle of contradiction, but rather a clever application of same in which there is room to say that between two seemingly opposed variables, a middle point can be found.

As might be expected, the idea is that by employing the African mode of thought issues in African philosophy can be analyzed in a more meaningful and platial way that would also resonate well with the idea of universal applicability. Examples of such issues include: the impact of democracy in Africa, what constitutes relevant knowledge for Africa, the notion of human rights in the undeveloped and developing parts of Africa, the significance of modernization in Africa, fundamentalism, the impact and relevance of religion in Africa, the role of education in Africa, the question of civilizing attitudes, individual liberty, ›bush mentality,‹ the problem of poverty, the challenge of ignorance, the dearth of enlightened leaders, the problem of followership, the question of progress – economic, political, technological, intellectual as the case may be, gay rights, the question of freedom, the question of reason, environmental challenges, corruption, animal rights, the question of creativity and originality, the question of innovation, and finally the questions concerning the sage – Who is a sage, who should he or she be? Is there still a need for sages in modern Africa? Is he/she the elder/oldest in the family, work place, community? Or is he/she the most enlightened? Continuing with other issues that touch on youth and liberty, we may ask; what are the roles of the youth in building a thriving Africa, what should they

²⁹ Cf. J. Chimakonam, ›Ezumezu: A Variant of Three-Valued Logic – Insights and Controversies,‹ Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa, Free State University, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Jan. 20–22, 2014; See also A. Agada, *Existence and Consolation: Reinventing Ontology, Gnosis and Values in African Philosophy*, J. O. Chimakonam (ed.) (Minnesota: Paragon House, 2015), p. 322.

be? What is the extent of their rights and liberties? What does equality mean for us, what should it mean? How should we define this concept within the relational matrix of men and women, and of adults and children? Where ought individuality find its place? What of freedom of speech? What of the courage to speak out? What of the journey of reason in Africa? What is the place of reason? What are the reasons why one should speak out? To what extent should numbers matter in policy issues in Africa? And the list goes on. In any event, these are some of the issues that should occupy contemporary African philosophers working for the good of what Innocent Asouzu calls the Africa we know (Asouzu 2004: 216).³⁰ To further make clear the focus of conversational philosophy, I shall outline its canons in the following section.

4 Canons of Conversational Philosophy

Canons generally refer to the standard rules or norms of a given system. The canons of conversational philosophy thus aim to streamline the minimum requirement, mode, focus, and direction of thinking in contemporary African philosophy. In essence, they are to serve as a check against illicit philosophical posturing³¹ which has been on the rise in African philosophy in the wake of post-debate disillusionment. Some self-styled African philosophers have taken advantage of the absence of standards to introduce confusion in a *systemless* African philosophy. They publish descriptive cultural inquiries lacking in systematicity and christen such work African philosophy. In the absence of properly formulated criteria and goals, African philosophy has remained in a vicious circle of burden of justification, perverse orientation, and philosophical nationalism.

Vest (2009: 21) was one of those who had called for some measures or tests to determine what falls under the category of properly produced African philosophy and to check the proliferation of illicit

³⁰ I. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection In and Beyond African Philosophy*, Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2004.

³¹ By illicit philosophical posturing I mean attempts that disregard the common indices of philosophical constructions. For example, it is accepted that proper philosophical systems are critical, argumentative, rigorous, categorical, prescriptive, questioning, evaluative, etc. An illicit philosophizing would include attempts that are merely descriptive, hypothetical, and narrative.

philosophizing. Thus to break through this logjam, it has become imperative to formulate these canons in order both to guide and to check standards in African philosophy; to wit:

1. Critical conversation: This canon stipulates that a standard work in African philosophy is one in which the author engages other authors/positions/philosophical traditions in a critical conversation.
2. Transformative indigenization: This canon stipulates that when authors write on non-African issues or employ foreign methods,³² they should endeavor to indigenize them through contextual transformation that would give them relevance in (contingent) African thought. The idea of indigenization is simply about finding contextual relevance and in no way does it suggest any kind of cultural bracketing of which ethnophilosophy is so often accused.
3. Noetic re-Africanization: This canon stipulates that an African philosopher is one who is versed in African intellectual life. But when such a person derails as a result of contact or undue influence by, Western mode of thought, such a person must deliberately undergo a measure of re-Africanization (a retuning or re-conscientization) in which he/she delicately balances Western and African modes of thought, recognizing the relevance of both modes in the construction of epistemes such as what Janheinz Jahn would refer to as the »neo-African culture« (Jahn 1961: 16–18). Again, the idea of an African mode of thought as used here does not suggest a culturally exclusive logic with separate set of rules of thought; rather it makes allusion to nuances in the application of those same rules. Odera Oruka in particular has made a strong reference to the importance of the writer of African philosophy being versed in the culture and intellectual life of Africa (Oruka 1975: 50).
4. Moderate decolonization: This canon stipulates that the African philosopher's posture toward African philosophy should not be

³² My reference to foreign methods should not be understood as creating a dichotomy between local and foreign methods unique unto themselves and with varying ontological commitments. In other words, I do not mean to say that they are methods that are tailor-made for African and Western philosophies respectively. I mean to say rather, that these are methods adequate for philosophizing in any tradition but which happen to be developed in Africa by African philosophers and in the West by Western philosophers.

that of radical decolonization as advocated by Kwasi Wiredu³³ but rather of moderate decolonization that would suggest the relevance of some parts of colonial mode of thought. This canon also stipulates that there shall not be any racial bar as to who is or can be an African philosopher. To me, anyone, regardless of racial background, can be an African philosopher. This subverts Paulin Hountondji's prescription that an African philosopher must be in fact an African (Hountondji 1996: xii).³⁴

5. Constructive modernization: This canon stipulates that a standard work in African philosophy is one that marks a fusion of relevant modernity (Western thought) and relevant tradition (African thought).
6. Non-veneration of authorities: This canon stipulates that any work in African philosophy, irrespective of the author, deserves a full measure of peer criticism. This canon can be credited to Peter Bodunrin (1985: xii, xiv).³⁵
7. Theoretic interrogation: This canon stipulates that the best route to the progressive development of African philosophy is through continuous interrogation. This interrogation involves peer-criticism, critical, but creative (re)construction of thoughts of fellow actors aimed at increasing the sophistication of the episteme. It recognizes Karl Popper's thesis that knowledge grows when we learn and correct our mistakes (2002: xii).³⁶
8. Checking perverse dialogues: This canon can be attributed to Jennifer Lisa Vest³⁷ and it stipulates that before any work is acknowledged as properly produced contemporary African philosophy, it must pass the test for perverse orientation (*ibid.*: 21).

Understandably, so important is this quest for progress in a conversational school structured to open new vistas in African philosophy that

³³ K. Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy: Four Essays*, O. Oladipo (ed.), Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1995, pp. 22–23. For a critique of Wiredu's conceptual decolonization see M. Edet, 'The Question of »Conceptual Decolonization« in African Philosophy and the Problem of the Language of »African« Philosophy: A Critique of Kwasi Wiredu and a Proposal for Conceptual Mandelanization in the Africa We Know» (Chimakonam 2015: 197–218).

³⁴ P. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

³⁵ P. Bodunrin, *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives*, Ile-Ife: University of Ile-Ife Press, 1985.

³⁶ K. R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, London: Routledge, 2002.

³⁷ Vest (2009: 21).

we devote this essay to it. One might ask: why should we bother with establishing canons? Does that not suggest a hegemonic sort of gate-keeping? And why should we indulge a new school of thought anyway? There is what I have labeled seven bulwarks that vitiate the growth and progress of African philosophy. These bulwarks are products of false attitudes, misinformation, and innocent misconceptions afflicting many African philosophers, which in turn vitiate the quality of the philosophy they produce. My list includes: historicist bandwagon, philosophical nationalism, cultural nostalgia, perverse orientation, Hountondji's dilemma, methodic apathy, and logical schizophrenia (see Chimakonam 2015: xii–xiv). It is important to explain however that the declaration of these canons is not intended to discriminate against some African philosophers, but rather that it aims at saving African philosophy from impending stagnation. Thus instead of looking at it as a means of excluding some works in African philosophy; it can be viewed in its positive light, which is as a means of including more works within African philosophy. Evidently, in the absence of a minimum standard, some African philosophers may be encouraged to put forward structures that would prove detrimental to the system.

The problem of a »copycat philosophy,« which Asouzu (2007: 30)³⁸ identified some time ago, has taken a firm grip such that non-Africans are beginning to level it as something of an accusation against African philosophers.³⁹ One of the most popular forms of copycat philosophy can be found in the type of books published by many philosophers in African universities. They buy one or two Western-authored books and then carefully re-copy the works, changing grammar from time to time, eventually binding it into classroom textbooks on ethics, epistemology, or metaphysics, as the case may be.

Added to the above is the problem I shall like to call »patronizing philosophy.« This is an intellectually retrogressive practice where some African philosophers expect their peers and students to praise (patronize) their works while they seldom condone any criticism.

³⁸ I. Asouzu, *Ibaru: The Heavy Burden of Philosophy Beyond African Philosophy*, Münster: Litverlag, 2007.

³⁹ J. Hengelbrock, »You Cannot Free Yourself from Hegel: An Encounter with Heinz Kimmerle,« see H. Kimmerle's response in the same volume: »The Stranger between Oppression and Superiority, Close encounter with Heinz Kimmerle,« *Intercultural Communication*, Introduction by J. Hoogland (www.galerie-inter.de/kimmerle; last retrieved 12 December 2014).

This in particular, now, threatens to destroy the post-graduate programs of philosophy in many African universities, Nigeria in particular. Academic journals are no longer peer-reviewed. My experience as a journal editor has been dismaying. For each volume that we publish, nearly fifty percent of reviewed articles are never resubmitted for publication. Authors simply frown at the critical commentaries and back off. I believe it was experiences like this that forced some philosophy journals to set aside processes of peer-review entirely and publish whatever colleagues submit after mild proofreading or grammar checks. Yet again though, we must not sweep under the rug the increasing trend among African philosophers where reviewers have tended to be more destructive rather than constructive. They emotionally attack an essay that they have been asked to review. As an editor, I have been disheartened to see language that betrays the passionate intent of some reviewers to destroy. Let there be no mistake; this »green« attitude has also discouraged many writers of African philosophy and kept many journals out of circulation.

The above problem connects well with another problem that Peter Bodunrin calls the »veneration of authorities« (1985: xii, xiv). Senior colleagues, particularly those who have been made professors, expect younger colleagues to deify them and venerate whatever they have written, even if such is lacking in depth. A certain professor colleague of mine once attempted bullying me into publishing a sub-standard article that he had helped a friend to put together. My insistence on the valid and recommended corrections needed to be made ended our friendship. This was what the distinguished Peter Bodunrin tried to warn against in 1985 when he urged African philosophers to develop scientific attitudes; to wit:

Essential features of the scientific attitude is freedom of enquiry, openness to criticism, a general type of skepticism and fallibilism and non-veneration of authorities [...] philosophy thrives on mutual criticism, and criticism is best when it is directed at those who are in a position to reply (Bodunrin 1985: xii, xiv).

The brilliant Beninese philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji corroborates this view when he points to the gains he had made as a result of the ideas of his critics, writing: »Yet I am grateful to most of my critics for prompting me to clarify certain ambiguities, refine some notions, and occasionally, deepen the analysis« (Hountondji 1996: viii). The growing culture in Nigerian academia, in which peer criticism is deni-

grated, calls for a collective fight. I must admit that some of these attitudes highlighted above are not peculiar to African academia, by no means. But it does seem that they are more serious and deeply entrenched (to a level of utter devastation of scholarship) in Africa, and this is what I decry.

Another problem is that of anachronism. Many essays and (annoyingly, too) a good number of full-length books published by some African colleagues and purporting to defend some thesis or another are anachronistic. That is to say, authors of such works fail to cite colleagues who have already written on the ideas in question, leading these authors to present such ideas as though they were the first to dwell on them – call it »the first-to-do-it syndrome.« Another form of anachronism inspired by petty attitudes is what occurs when authors intentionally avoid citing a colleague who is working in the same area or one who has criticized their works. They go ahead to appropriate the gains of the criticism in another work without citing the colleague from whose critique or work they have benefitted. All of this and more make it imperative for us to introduce certain canons of practice in African philosophy in order to enable us check against plummeting standards in the construction of contemporary African philosophy. Another accompanying reason comes with the observation that in general practice in most places, every progressive system is backed up by a minimum standard of practice.

5 Conclusion: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of »Philosophical Space«

Having come thus far in our explication of conversational philosophy, I shall conclude this paper by reflecting on the thoughts of Janz, specifically on his conception of philosophical space. I want to hold this conversation with the brilliant African philosopher Janz here for two reasons: Janz is one of the few African philosophers today who promote conversational philosophy in exciting ways and in the spirit of conversational philosophy, as sketched above. I have found reason to converse with him in order to deepen the definition and conception of what I shall call »philosophical space,« a notion which he first suggests in *Philosophy in an African Place*. However, his treatment of this important concept was indirect, which necessitates this conversation. In treating the question of the topeme, he juxtaposes space with

place and sees space as allied with, or as a function of, modernity, whereas place is seen as traditional (Janz 2009: 13–14). He attributes the character of the globalization or the spatialization of thought to space and suggests that places point to cultural units (what he terms »platial philosophy«), just as space could be conceived as their common ground. I agree with his conception of »platial philosophy,« which I alternatively dub »philosophical place,« and I reckon with his idea of »space,« which I dub »philosophical space.« My aim in this conversation is to move from Janz's articulation and deepen the concept of »philosophical space,« to draw attention to it, and to make it more regular in the African philosophical place. The ideas of these two concepts (philosophical space and philosophical place) bring to life the discourses in African philosophy on universalism and particularism respectively.

A number of African philosophers, and Wiredu, in particular, have dedicated space in writings to the dicey issues of universalism and particularism⁴⁰ as they affect the African philosophical tradition. The lead questions generally are: Is African philosophy African and universal? Or is it African and border-sensitive? If it is border-sensitive, what makes it philosophy and if it is universal, what makes it African? Wiredu was able to show that it is perfectly possible for a discourse to be African (particular, in which an attempt is made to answer the philosophical questions that are raised within a given culture) and also universal, provided certain conditions like critical rigor and rational individual engagements are met in its construction, with these marking some of our shared traits as human species (*ibid.*: 1–9). Employing a different terminology, to wit »place,« Janz drove home this point in his book appropriately titled *Philosophy in an African Place*, arguing that different philosophy traditions in the world represent different philosophical places. Put in his terms, Janz observes that the geography of philosophy (particularism) does not lead to ethno-philosophy. Placing philosophy in a geography simply suggests that it has contingent but not arbitrary interest, that it responds to and shapes a particular set of conditions of reflection. It is therefore the contention of Janz that philosophy must attend to the conditions in which its questions arise, and that this attention does not diminish

⁴⁰ K. Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

philosophy's traditional (although never completely fulfilled) striving for universals (2009: 2).

Thus with the idea above Janz suggests that philosophical places (platial philosophies) are particulars which do not short-change their universal inclination and whose particular resurgence is not silenced by their universal resonance. A lot has been said about the criteria of universal philosophy or of the identity of any philosophy that is at once particular and universal, so I shall not dwell broadly on such a metaphilosophical exercise here. Members of the professional school in African philosophy made it their goal to establish these criteria and they did so in no confusing terms. Such a philosophy, they say, must be rigorous, critical, as well as individualistic and it must thrive on Western methods such as analysis.⁴¹

My conversation with Janz here would not be defined by the question of whether African philosophy credibly constitutes a »philosophical place,« for that is now a foregone conclusion. It would however be defined by his conception of »space,« which I find among other things, full of insights, although these are largely undeveloped. Before I begin, it is important that I distinguish between his conception of »space« and his conception of »spatial philosophy« – two seemingly related concepts but with different meanings.⁴² »Space« for him stands at the opposite end of »place« as a form of common ground where different philosophical places can relate to each other (Janz 2009: 14), perhaps in a form of intercultural conversation. On the other hand, Janz explains in another work that:

African philosophy is spatial when it thinks of itself as analogous to a country on a map, and sets out to reclaim intellectual territory that was appropriated in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century by European thinkers. It defines its borders, establishes citizenry, and defends the »country« against invaders (Janz 2015: 133).

He suggests this also in another earlier work (Janz 2009: 28–29). It must be stated here that Janz's conceptions of »spatial philosophy«

⁴¹ For material concerning this argument, see the following works: O. Oruka, »The Fundamental Principles in the Question of African Philosophy,« *Second Order*, Vol. 4, No. 1 1975; K. Wiredu, »On Defining African Philosophy,« in Momoh 2000; Wright (1984); H. Maurier, »Do We have an African Philosophy?« Wright (1984); Hountondji (1996); P. Bodunrin, »The Question of African Philosophy,« in Wright (1984).

⁴² I wish to acknowledge one of the anonymous reviewers of the draft manuscript of this paper for drawing my attention to this distinction.

and »space« could very easily lead to a misreading of him. Evidently, he derived the qualifying terms »patial« and »spatial« from the concepts of »place« and »space« respectively. But, while he went on to develop patial philosophy as an offshoot of his concept of »place,« he did not do the same with »spatial philosophy« and his concept of »space.« Granting his poetic license to do as he did, it must not be ignored that the style was cumbersome in a way that could deceive his readers upon first sight. Keeping this distinction constantly in mind could save us from the problems arising from amphibious shifts in the meanings derivable from his concepts and his conceptions of them. Janz evidently did not consider this very seriously. His conception of »space,« or what I call »philosophical space,« therefore would not provide the abstract framework for his conception of »spatial philosophy,« conceived of as something resembling a geographical map, one which some African philosophers might strive to appropriate and defend. Instead he conceives of it as a framework where the various philosophical places could converge to relate to each other. Agreements with this conception notwithstanding, I choose to think more of the importance and significance of »philosophical space« especially in connection to my idea of the contemporary development of African philosophy as being conversational. In philosophical space, I find an abstract *agora* for intercultural and cross-cultural conversations where various philosophical places might be able to transcend mere relation and become able to look at their shared values and points of divergence. It is where each party could contest what is claimed to be exclusively owned and protest what appears to be commonly shared. In one word, »philosophical space,« for me, is the hub of comparative and intercultural thought into which various philosophical places strive to enter.

The position of Janz on »space« is not so far away from mine, as he clearly recognizes the importance of a common *agora*. According to him:

Place is not space, after all, and if we start with the idea that philosophy comes from place, are we also faced with the impossibility of finding common ground for those places? In short, if we start from place, and ask about the place(s) of African philosophy, our problem becomes how (or whether) those places can relate to each other [...] The question of the *topeme* also raises the issue of the distinction between space and place. Space is sometimes seen to be allied with, or a function of, modernity, while place is seen as more traditional. This might suggest that a place is an irreducible unit of

cultural meaning, which is being destroyed by spatial thinking in the form of globalization (Janz 2009: 13–14).

In the above passage Janz recognizes that the idea of philosophical places suggests strongly the idea of a common ground. He did not however identify this common ground as »philosophical space,« as I now do. He identifies it simply as »space,« which in my view is too simplistic and which either belittles the significance of the concept in the new era of African philosophy or fails to transform it into a viable concept for the future development of African philosophy.

Therefore, in this new age of African philosophy the concept of philosophical space is pregnant. It is more so in that it holds the key to better understanding of the (1) significance of intercultural/comparative thought in our age, and (2) the importance of the reducibility of positions to different philosophical places. While the significance of the former cannot be compromised, the importance of the latter can no longer be questioned, let alone ignored. For me, the important idea that arises in the constitution of philosophical space is a new one and can be formulated simply as that of contestation and protestation, i. e. some philosophical places contesting whether »one« deserves a space and »one« protesting that it does deserve a space. Janz even makes allusion to this idea of contestation and protestation when he states that »African philosophy has a space in the world of philosophy, it has just not yet been recognized« (Janz 2009: 29). Thus, the philosophical space serves for me as a harbinger of what I shall call the »Global Expansion of Thought« (GET). For me, GET entails the exportation of the fruits of the philosophical places to the market of philosophical space. Janz also makes allusion to this notion when he employs the terms spatialization and globalization (*ibid.*: 14). However, he appears to express concern that the spatial tendency in African philosophy can result in a lack of attention to place (*ibid.*: 14). Janz's worry is that the drive toward globalized thought could have an uncharitable effect on philosophical places such as that of African philosophy by reducing its assumptions to mere cases in point. I shall hesitate to agree with Janz on this position. I think that this matter is more about an individual's state of mind. It is hardly definite. I can choose to see the GET as having a clearly positive effect on philosophical places by constituting them as genuine contexts in which the universal mind unfolds – a form of contextual manifestation of philosophical reason. In conversational philosophy, the actors mentioned in this essay are philoso-

phers who have sought to establish African philosophy as a place from where they attempted to find a space for it within philosophical space. In no way have their thoughts or approaches translated into a petty geographical reduction.

From the foregoing therefore, one may find that it is not the authenticity of Janz's conception of ›space‹ that compels this conversation; it is rather its conceptualization and its depth. For one, the word ›space‹ is too simplistic. It is a common concept that dots the horizon of many disciplines such as geometry, physics, geography, astronomy, and architecture, to name just a few. To conceptualize it simplistically in philosophy would do no more than evoke a familiar impression. To avoid this possible objection, I have conceptualized it as »philosophical space.« One might be tempted to ask: so what is the difference? Disappointingly, there is none essentially besides a stronger image or impression. Yet it is this that makes all the difference when philosophers choose one theory to analyze from a pack of a thousand others. Employing the adjective ›philosophical‹ to qualify space concretely locates the concept within philosophy and readily whips up the interest of philosophers. Without the adjective however, the conceptualization ›space‹ and the passing conceptualization Janz gives it make it sound more like an orphan. I do not see how that conception and conceptualization could open further vistas. It is as if one is told an important story in an uninspiring way. There is a sneering road-end to this conception and conceptualization. ›Space‹ as a common ground where philosophical places could relate is not only lacking in depth but is also too simplistic. Janz's presentation of this concept is like a flash in a pan, hardly vigorous enough to command enduring attention.

Indeed, in the later chapters of his book (Chapters 5 and 8) he hits upon the concept of space as a common ground every now and then. In one passage, he discusses the attempts by Wiredu and Oruka to establish a common ground for communication between cultures, but that is still insufficient. Janz was for the most part directly dealing with the more familiar idea of cultural universals, touching on the argument that universals should not pose a barrier to the manifestation of particulars. My conversation with Janz here aims at deepening that conception of ›space‹ beginning with its re-conceptualization as »philosophical space.« Interestingly, concepts are not only important in philosophy; they are the engine that spins out new thoughts. Janz states pointedly that concepts are used creatively to produce new con-

cepts through asking new questions (*ibid.*: 213). As cardinal as the role of concepts in thought might be, it should not be ignored that they are just about the most unfaithful, if not outright flirtatious entities in philosophy. This is because, by the power of stipulation, philosophers are always able to define concepts to suit their projects. And taking up that same simplistic method, many a philosopher's definitions of a certain concepts differ in degree from those of others. Beyond this though, concepts become messengers of the philosophical enterprise carrying meanings that dart from context to context. This has not and will never deduct from the value of concepts in philosophy whether it is in terms of place or in space.

I think that to develop African philosophy in a conversational mode, we must concentrate on generating new concepts. Janz (*ibid.*) does not think otherwise, but his inattention to the genetic coloration of new concepts where he conceptualizes ›space‹ is costly. We must find ways to compel the existing concepts to bear witness against themselves rather than attempting to silence them – a form of an inbuilt termination mechanism; and we must aim at making the concepts come alive, not at deactivating them. As unimportant as this proposal might sound, philosophers are unlikely to be attracted to a dull conceptualization. And until philosophers employ concepts creatively by asking questions, new concepts cannot be produced. Concepts, on their own, do not cross-pollinate. To this end, my rejection of Janz's conceptualization of space is a protestation aimed at reactivating the concept. Janz, in his interpretation, has literally silenced the pregnant concept of space in philosophy. It does appear, therefore, that to rescue the concept from Janz's dull conceptualization is one of the focal points of this conversation. Thus rather than ›space‹, I say »philosophical space.«

By philosophical space, I mean that abstract meeting point of world philosophies. The encounter that occurs in this space has variously been described as one of intercultural or comparative philosophy. In this way, the philosophical space would stand at the opposite end of philosophical place or platial philosophy. The idea is that with their various relative geographies, different philosophical traditions represent, as we have said, the philosophical places (cultures) that inspire their emergence. Yet, each, in a sustained movement towards the universal, converges with other philosophical traditions at a comparative level. This is what I have chosen to interpret as philosophical space. In a way, this conceptualization also makes clear a sense of the

frequently asked question: can a philosophy be particular (African, Oriental, Caribbean, Western, etc., in a relative sense) and still be universal? The answer is plain; every philosophical tradition is first relative in the sense that each arises as a result of questions asked in a particular culture and becomes universal or universalizable when the attempts to answer those culture-inspired questions are made following procedures which may not be identical with those of other traditions, but which represent the same universal standard. Hence, it is my argument that every philosophical place should strive to enter a philosophical space where it initiates further conversations with other traditions. Let me attempt a diagrammatic representation of this movement below.

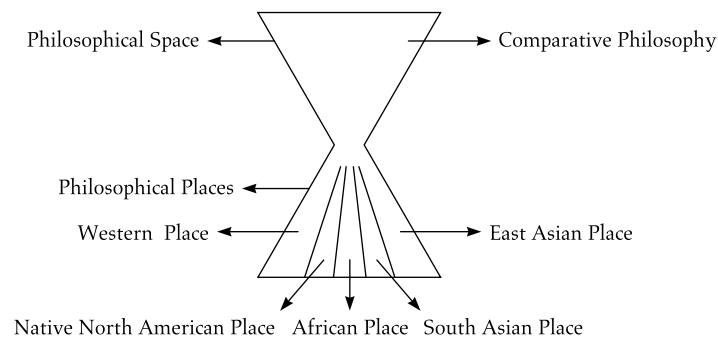


Figure 1. Place-space diagram in African Philosophy

The point of this diagram is to demonstrate the necessary interconnections that must exist among different philosophical traditions. It means that the activity of philosophizing or conversation is not exhausted in philosophical places. As autonomous as these places may seem, the sublime philosophical goal must be to reach philosophical space and converse with other world philosophies. This spatial conversation, it must be remarked, is not a replacement for platial conversations. This still leaves philosophical place at a point of great importance because it is where the philosopher actually emerges from, whereas philosophical space is what he/she strives for.

But philosophical places, however and wherever they are constituted, must be wary of the danger of what I would like to call »conceptual envelopment« – an unintended ethnocentric bracketing of concepts in a philosophical tradition such that they are not considered

open to use by other traditions. Any philosophical place is guilty of »conceptual envelopment« when its accumulated concepts are treated as if they are privileged philosophical paraphernalia of its designated place and would not be relevant in other philosophical places. In this way, actors of a designated philosophical tradition could unconsciously believe that whatever appropriation of these concepts and tools of reasoning done by the »other« would have to be fakes, copycats, or mere transliterations of the originals developed in their own respective places. This could propel actors to maintain a position of »conceptual envelopment« in error. This is perhaps, another way of making the point Janz himself attempts to make, this time by warning that the attempt at what he calls spatial philosophy in African philosophy could lead to the creation of borders of isolation (*ibid.*: 30). More than any other variety in our age, Western philosophy is now faced with this danger.

I think that the concept of philosophical space is sure to become central in comparative thought and to the program of Global Expansion of Thought (GET), where it promises to open further vistas. GET is, in my view, the omega point or the highest level of philosophical conversation originating from any designated philosophical place. Actors in various philosophical places must therefore overcome the lure of conceptual envelopment and realize the major significance of intercultural conversations in our ever-globalizing world. According to Chamsy El-Ojeili and Patrick Hayden, Bauman conceives of my idea of GET as »time-space compression« and John Lechte defines it in terms of the point of connectedness, which according to El-Ojeili and Hayden is suggested in Marshall McLuhan's 1962 phrase »the global village,« which literally regards globalization as an emerging global consciousness.⁴³ Understanding that our world is evolving into a compressed space is key to understanding the importance of comparative thinking. On the strength of the foregoing, any existing mind-view in the different philosophical traditions which still emphasizes the dichotomy between superior and inferior, real and unreal philosophies, true and false philosophies, original or imitation, philosophers that are worth talking to and others that are not, must now be discarded as they lead to various forms of conceptual envelopment in which one philosophical place considers its set of concepts not only

⁴³ C. El-Ojeili, and P. Hayden, *Critical Theories of Globalization*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

pristine but exclusive to discourses within it. All this clearly amounts to intellectual cowardice.

We must therefore shun intellectual cowardice and engage the other, rather than staying in our enclosed world and dangerously assuming that others are not worth talking to, that we are self-sufficient, that reason has its abode in our place, that the sanctity of our place must not be polluted or violated, etc. This is the summation of the idea behind conversational philosophy, whether it is thought of in terms of place or space, whether as a method or as a school, whether in African philosophy or in Western philosophy or in Oriental philosophy or in Martian philosophy. Philosophy in this age must therefore achieve consummation at a comparative level. That, now more than ever before, seems clear as philosophy's ultimate destination in our time. The ultimate goal of philosophy has been and will always remain ensuring the continuous unfolding of reason from the particular places to the universal space.

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From Proto-materialism to Materialism: The Indian Scenario

Abstract

Pāyāsi and Ajita Kesakambala in the Buddhist canonical literature and Uddālaka Āruṇi in the Upanisadic literature maybe taken as proto-materialists in the Indian context. The development from the primitive stage to a full-fledged doctrine saw the birth of two distinct materialist systems in the early centuries of the Common Era. They are called *bhūtavāda* (elementalism) and Lokāyata in the Tamil epic, *Maṇimēkalai*. These two systems are the representatives of old or Pre-Cārvāka materialism in India. By the eighth century CE we come to hear of the Cārvākas, the last of the materialists, who differed radically from the old schools by admitting the role of inference in however restricted a manner, without dispensing with its materialist fundamentals. The paper traces the growth, course of the development of materialism and enumerates the sources from which much information can be gathered.

Keywords

bhūtavāda, Cārvāka, inference, Lokāyata, perception, proto-materialism.

1 Introduction

The course of philosophy all over the world did not follow a single pattern. Yet it is interesting to note how the sixth/fifth century BCE threw up several socio-political ideas and philosophical doctrines, both materialist and idealist, in faraway places, unrelated and almost unbeknown to one another. D. D. Kosambi (1907–1966), the mathematician-turned-Indologist, once observed: