

SCEPTICISM IN AFRICA: AN EPISTEMIC CUM AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRAJECTORY

Elias Ifeanyi E. Uzoigwe

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.
fruzoigwe@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this work, I will be exploring the possibility of African scepticism in the philosophical milieu, and also in advancing the course of African philosophical discourse. This will be the underlying focus of this study. Employing the terms epistemic and trajectory is a way of trying to show that though scepticism is the fulcrum or pedestal upon which epistemology springs up as a branch of philosophy, however, the fact remains that African scepticism is not wishful thinking but a reality. Some of the philosophers of African descent whose works prove the existence of African scepticism like Hountondji, Asouzu, Wiredu, Oruka, and a host of others deserve grateful acknowledgment. It is in the process of other African philosophers' objective reactions, critiques, criticisms and counter criticisms to their sceptical views that African philosophy, African philosophers and African scepticism are powerfully made more evident as realities in the philosophical enterprise. This work strongly holds that the attitude of undermining the efforts of African philosophers by fellow African scholars should be discouraged, rather the mindset should be that of African philosophical ecumenism where each scholar and school collaborate and corroborate with others to synergise for the advancement of thoughts and ideas that are indigenous to Africa, enrich and employ them in tackling the problems that are facing African and still extend generous hands of assistance in tackling the global challenge.

Keywords: African Scepticism, Epistemology, African Philosophy, African Philosopher, and African philosophical Ecumenism.

INTRODUCTION

Africa has been classified by some Western scholars and some scholars of African descent too (though at times unintentionally) in a manner that limits knowledge, understanding and the capacity to philosophise. It was not only the possibility of African philosophy that was downplayed as a mirage or at best given a partial view concerning the capacity for intellectual activities (to philosophise) by the scholars of African origin, but also the possibility of scepticism from the African perspective (Edet 2003). The good news is that African Philosophy is not only a reality; however, there is also overwhelming evidence of the role of scepticism in African philosophy. The inevitability and relevance of African scepticism within the context of 21st-century philosophical discourse cannot be over-emphasised. Imoh & Thomas (2015) seems to subscribe to this view when he writes:

...Africa has been otherised in a way that limits knowledge and understanding. This conception of Africa as 'other than us' legitimises this impression that Africans think and behave in the same way, as opposed to other non-Africans....Scepticism in Africa matters because it provides a platform to highlight these critical perspectives.

Fortunately, the question of whether there is African Philosophy in general or African epistemology in particular as well as whether there are African philosophers has long been considered as a forgotten issue. It is so because philosophy or even epistemology as a branch of philosophy is not peculiar to a particular culture, so is scepticism. People of diverse cultures and orientations have a philosophy and the issue of the quest for knowledge that is peculiar to them. Scepticism is not also peculiar to any cultural milieu. It is a reality that is evident in all cultures of the world. There is no known place around the globe where people do not raise doubts, if not of the possibility of knowledge and

certainty, at least, about the possibility of some kind of knowledge. It is a fact that skepticism permeates philosophy, but it domiciles more within the epistemic domain of philosophical inquiry, where the possibility of certain, universal and objective knowledge or truth was and remains an important issue for debate. It is against this backdrop that this work strongly holds that since epistemology began from skeptics' strong resistance to the possibility of knowledge, and there is African epistemology, the fact that there is African scepticism becomes inevitable. It was as a result of philosophers' reactions against the Sophist's denial of the possibility of universal and objective knowledge/truth (especially the claims made by Gorgias) that epistemology arose as a branch of philosophy.

There is glaring evidence of scepticism not only in Western philosophy but also in African philosophy. Just like Gorgias and his company (the Sophists) triggered scepticism in Western philosophical discourse, Wiredu and others like Hountondji also championed scepticism in African philosophical enterprise. It has to be clearly stated from the outset that though Hountondji, Asouzu, Wiredu, Oruka and others, for instance, cannot be strictly called sceptics, it is important to note that some of their views and approaches to African philosophy are sceptical. It is in that sense that they are called 'African sceptics', the same sense Descartes, Hume, Kant, Husserl and others could also be called 'sceptics in the West'. It is also of importance to note that Hountondji, Asouzu, Wiredu, Oruka and other African scholars' sceptical approach and method of doubt can be recuperated with the kind of scepticism advanced by Descartes, Hume, Kant, Husserl and others. One thing they have in common is that in their various brand of scepticism they did not doubt to remain in doubt. They were looking for a better starting point for philosophical inquiry in Africa and in the West from their variegated approach and unique points of view. Scepticism is a philosophical attitude that permeates both Africa and the West. The reactions of some of the African philosophers to the sceptical views which some philosophers of African origin and others from the West hold against Africa and African philosophy on some critical issues in African philosophical discourse ennobles.

Hountondji as cited in Ozumba (2002) argues that "philosophy is a universal discipline which does not need to have the African version except for geographical relevance of the issues discussed and the cultural mindset applied in such discourse". This is scepticism at play. One would not have committed the fallacy of hasty conclusion for not allowing Hountondji to conclude and responding that Hountondji got it wrong at this point because it is overwhelmingly necessary to have a philosophy that is indigenous to African people both for geographical and global relevance; a philosophy that will be geared towards tackling those challenges facing African and also focus on contributing in tackling the problem of humanity at the global scale. Hountondji (1983), Asouzu (2007, 2013), Wiredu, Oruka (1991) and a host of others' positions help in no small measures in reawakening African scholars to define themselves and their views in the scheme of things within the existential milieu. It is important to note that reference will be made to the works of some indigenous African philosophers proximately or remotely and by so doing extrapolate some of the sceptical dimensions of their views which will in no small measure help in instantiating the claim that there is scepticism in African philosophy and that these sceptical positions make African philosophy to thrive. Wiredu's works will be referenced more than others in this exercise because of its richness in instantiating the claims to the possibility of African scepticism.

As it were, Wiredu seems to have clearly understood himself as a 'sceptic' in the likes of Descartes, a position which he intentionally adopted in order to contribute his quota in developing African philosophy. This work is not about Wiredu but in all the

works I consulted in this research, he has a lot to prove that in African philosophy lies a great deal of scepticism. He holds that “in postcolonial Africa, we are still in a phase of cultural nationalism in which it sounds like a betrayal to many people to criticize aspects of the philosophical tradition of our ancestors”(Wiredu 1980, pp. 102). This implies that Wiredu and of course some other African philosophers cited or not cited in this work consciously and conscientiously raised doubts and make critiques of some of the philosophical traditions in Africa to better them to stand shoulder high with another world best practices. Whose responsibility it is in deciding what counts for world best practices is another serious issue for debate but as it were outside the scope of this work. This inquiry on the sceptical cum epistemic trajectory in African philosophy will also highlight the inevitability, significance and relevance of Africa Philosophy. It is so because it was mistakably construed that there is nothing like African philosophy. The same misconception also lingers today that some see the possibility of scepticism in African philosophy as inconceivable. Some of the Western scholars had *ab initio* conducted their debate with the unfounded claims that Africans and Africa are inconsequential and irrelevant for philosophical knowledge. This must have been the reason why Sogolo in his book, *Foundations of African Philosophy*, holds that “African Philosophy has to be viewed from the point of view of relevance” (1993, pp. 1). Essentially, scepticism as a philosophical attitude just like every other approach to philosophy is not without challenges as this work makes evident.

SCEPTICISM

Let me begin by saying without equivocations that every definition is by analysis. Scepticism derives from the Greek word ‘skeptikos’, which means ‘inquirers’. There is also another Greek derivative of scepticism - ‘skeptikos’ which means ‘inquiry or questioning’. Scepticism is the denial or doubt of the possibility of knowledge. The implication of knowledge is a certainty. To claim to know something implies being certain or being sure about that thing. Philosophers who doubt the possibility of knowledge in general or certain forms of knowledge in particular are called sceptics. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines scepticism as “a critical philosophical attitude that questions the reliability of the knowledge claims of philosophers and others. Originally the Greek term *skeptikos* meant “inquirers.” Philosophical skeptics have been engaged in an inquiry into the alleged human achievements in different fields to see if any knowledge has been or could be gained by them...Skeptics have organized their questioning into systematic sets of arguments aimed at raising doubts.

In Western philosophy, for instance, the Sophists who lived around the 5th century B.C. were the first group of philosophers that vigorously questioned the possibility of knowing anything for certain. They doubted the possibility of true and certain knowledge and at the same time questioned the claim that such knowledge is attainable by man. It was the thinking of these philosophers that man cannot be sure of anything, he cannot be sure that he knows anything, because certainty regarding anything is an impossible task. The tradition of scepticism comes from the writings of Cicero, Sextus Empiricus and Diogenes Laertius. According to these writers, the origin of scepticism is antecedent to Socrates’ time. The presence of opposites, contradictory and conflicting information must have raised doubt in the minds of early inquirers. Xenophanes (a contemporary of Socrates) raised the question of the possibility of the existence of any criterion for true knowledge. Gorgias on his own declared the total impossibility of knowledge (Ozumba 2002, pp. 30). It is important to note that in order to put a stamp on his universal skepticism, Gorgias of

Leotini, the leader of the Sophists published a book where he argued that, “Nothing exists, if anything exists, it cannot be known, and if it can be known, it cannot be communicated to others” (Sarachukwuaka, 2016, pp. 8). As if that was not enough, Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360 - c. 270 B.C) founded a school of scepticism, and with the members of his school and strongly denied the possibility man of knowing what things really are. They construed that the human mind cannot penetrate the substance of things. By implication, they argued that man cannot grapple with things as they are, we cannot know what things really are. We can only know things as they appear to us. Similarly, a disciple of Pyrrho, Timon of Philus, argued that nobody can say that honey is sweet; we can only say the way it appears to us individually. The above experiences of scepticism are not peculiar to Western philosophy. Some philosophers of African descent in a like manner raised doubts, questioned and denied not only the possibility of objective and universal knowledge, or truth but also the possibility of African Philosophy in general, ethnophilosophy and African epistemology in particular. Being sceptical about the possibility of African philosophy because of lack of printed materials, Wiredu argues, “you do not go to peasant or fetish priests or court personalities, but to the individual thinkers in person or in print” (1980, pp. 47-48). Referring to the Traditional African Philosophy as not really philosophy, Wiredu as cited by Omoregbe (1990), avers that, “without argument and clarification, there is, strictly, no philosophy”. African traditional philosophy, according to him, is termed philosophy only on a “generous understanding of the term”. The fact remains that in so far as logic, clarification (analysis) are part of philosophy, it is important to note that philosophy is essentially a reflective activity. No doubt philosophy cannot do without logic and critical thinking, but the essence of philosophy is not logic but reflection.

African scepticism is, therefore, any philosophical attitude, or tradition which expresses doubt as to the possibility of certain knowledge or any kind of knowledge within the framework of African cultural cum existential milieu. There are extreme and moderate African scepticism as well as sceptics that espouse them. When one doubts the possibility of knowledge including the possibility of scepticism itself, such a person is an extreme sceptic that is engaged in extreme scepticism. However, if one doubts the possibility of only some kind of knowledge, such a person is a moderate sceptic who is expressing moderate scepticism. In *A Concise Introduction to Epistemology*, the author writes: “The moderate sceptics accept the possibility of certain forms of knowledge while the extreme sceptics discountenance the possibility of any form of knowledge...” (Ozumba 2002, pp. 28). According to Okafor, “Like Houndtondji, Wiredu is also a 'sceptic of a sort' in so far as his view that African traditional philosophy falls short of the required scientific standard which will invariably be at the service of modernization is concerned” (2004, pp. 4). No wonder, Wiredu, advancing his sceptical approach to African philosophy suggests “revolution in intellectual habits” (32) as a way Africans can meet up with the demands of the modern world in so far as philosophising is concerned. Okafor further holds that Wiredu’s radical way of raising doubts about African philosophy goes a long way to prove that in African there is a place for scepticism (2004, pp. 5).

UNDERSTANDING SCEPTICISM FROM THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

It has to be reiterated that the debate whether there is African philosophy or not has been put to final rest through concerted efforts by some scholars of African descent. It is apparent today both in Africa and in the West that African philosophy is real and authentic. Africans can philosophise and systematise their thoughts in a coherent, logical and sound manner. For Omoregbe, African philosophy should be a reflection on African existential

situation. In Bodunrin's understanding, African philosophy must be analytical and critical. According to Oladipo (1998), African philosophy must take care of human interest. For Uduigwomen, it is a reflection on the emerging needs of the African people. Pantaleon Iroegbu construes that African philosophy is reflective and systematic activity into the fundamental questions that confront the human being (1997, pp. 116). In all the above attempts at defining African philosophy, one thing is certain, that is, that African philosophy is a reflective activity that touches the African life is its totality. To grapple with scepticism from the African perspective, one necessarily has to understand the role scepticism has played in African Philosophy. Scepticism has helped in no small measures in the establishment and advancement of African philosophy, and the designation of the nomenclature - an African philosopher. It has greatly awakened scholars of African descent from their slumber and their comfort zone and launched them into real philosophising. A case in point is that in his sceptical approach to the idea of ethnophilosophy, Hountondji defines entho-philosophy as "an ethnological work with philosophical pretensions" (1983, pp. 34). According to Omowoyela, "The works being referred to by Hountondji includes "the works of all those who like Placid Temples, Alexis Kagame, John Mbiti, and other ethnologists who have attempted to articulate African philosophies or systems of thought" (Owomoyela, 1987, pp. 6). This must have prompted Mudimbe to describe Hountondji's book cited above as "the 'bible' of anti-ethnophilosophers" (1983, pp. 199); and "a veritable instrument for African scepticism" (Okafor 2004, pp. 84).

When the debate became highly intense as to the authenticity of ethnophilosophy as really a discipline within African philosophy Hountondji being highly sceptical argued that ethnophilosophy is a false discipline which he described as "a hybrid ideological discipline without a status in the world of theory... an indeterminate discourse with no object...it could not, cannot, and will 'never' yield a genuine philosophy" (1983, pp. 50-62). This is a case of extreme scepticism by Hountondji. Sceptical attitude towards African philosophy did not stop at that, another Africa scholar trying to undermine ethnophilosophy writes, "the view that anything can pass for philosophy will hurt the development of philosophy in Africa. Philosophy requires training" (Bodunrin 1985, pp. 178). It can now be better understood when Wiredu referred to African philosophy as "philosophy in the making" (1985, pp. 36) trying to show that there was not yet African philosophy as one can boldly say Western philosophy. From the above, Bodunrin is not only downplaying the possibility of ethnophilosophy as an authentic philosophical system espoused and advanced in African, but he unintentionally undermined the legitimacy of African philosophers themselves for not having training. Unfortunately, he did not tell us who an African philosopher is, at least, from his own perspective.

Some Western scholars had already concluded that just like in the Bible they already have the prophets. The founder and chief exponent of *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy aver that "Since most of these early philosophical prophets in their estimation, are Westerners, and for that reason, all subsequent attempts to put up systematic theories are mere imitations – and this has to be discouraged and resisted. Such is the type of motives, it seems to me, that drive Kimmerle and Hengelbrock in their infamous contest for Hegel's legacies where they accuse African philosophers of copying the systems of Western philosophers in the name of doing African philosophy (Asouzu 2007, pp. 27-36, 2013, pp 38). The Western scholars took a lot of things for granted in assessing African philosophy and African philosophers with a high level of scepticism. The good news is that some of the contemporary philosophers of African descent understand this problem, have and are

still making efforts to solving them by proving that in Africa also lies sceptics and scepticism. The sight must not be lost of the fact that there has been a serious debate on the nomenclature that will be most fitting for African philosophy. Some scholars call Ethno-philosophy while others prefer Traditional African philosophy and Contemporary African philosophy. Wiredu is one of those who insist that African philosophy is an impossible task to accomplish, and did not also subscribe to the idea of traditional African philosophy but contemporary African philosophy. He avers,

If African philosophy means traditional African philosophy, as surprisingly many people seem to think, then we can forget any pretence to modern philosophising. In most parts of Africa, we would have, in that case, to abstain from such disciplines as symbolic logic and its philosophical interpretation, the philosophy of mathematics and the natural and social sciences, the theory of knowledge associated with the foregoing disciplines and the moral, political and social philosophy which has arisen as a response to the needs of modern times. We would have to regard all such disciplines as un-African and content ourselves with repeating the proverbs and folk conceptions of our forefather. Or, should we be moved by some quirk of the spirit to dabble into those modern disciplines, we would have to represent ourselves as venturing into the un-African domain (1980, pp.-xi).

One thing I have to acknowledge Wiredu for is his unpretentious, honest and open-minded submissions. However, Wiredu mistakably construed traditional African philosophy would mean a hair-splitting exercise to be regarded as African philosophy. One clear thing is that just as the positions of the early Greeks skeptics and Sophists helped in no small measures in the development of Western philosophy, the traditional African philosophy, proverbs and folk conceptions of our forefathers when questioned and critiqued help in the advancement of African philosophy. Some of the traditional philosophical views were critical, logical and were founded on reality. They simply missed the mark of codification, a culture that pushed Western philosophy so high. Again, the quest for knowledge in the areas of philosophy of mathematics, natural and social sciences, theory of knowledge, social and political philosophy are not issues that are peculiar to the West. It is no longer news today that there are African epistemic ideas, African socio-political philosophy and philosophers like Zik and Nkrumah and so forth. Similarly, such disciplines like logic should not be regarded as un-African, and in those folk tales and proverbs of our forefathers are not devoid of logic and critical thinking, and even analyticity. For Wiredu (1980) what is happening in African is not African philosophy, but a cultural transition. Little wonder he describes African thought patterns as the exigencies of the cultural transition that is taking place in contemporary Africa.

According to Wiredu, “folk thought consists of bald assertions without supportive arguments (1980, pp. 47). Some of the indigenous scholars of African descent responded to this position of Wiredu on the possibility of African philosophy. In his response Omoregbe writes, “Yet we know that they are not gratuitous assertions, for the original authors of these ideas and views had their reasons for holding and advancing them. They are not bald assertions but the fruit of reflection, the conclusions of a reasoning process. These African thinkers did not just advance these ideas and views without reasons or without thinking and reflecting on the issues in question. They did not put their reasoning in the form of Aristotle’s syllogism or Russell’s logical form, but they evidently had their reasons. Wiredu’s attitude to African traditional philosophy is sceptical in nature, and it has yielded some dividends for African philosophy. African traditional philosophy is not

the only philosophy of Africa. Contemporary Africans also philosophize. One can agree with Wiredu on this unambiguous position that the term “African philosophy” should not be understood only in terms of African traditional philosophy since there is also contemporary African philosophy (Wiredu xi). Further concurring with Wiredu Omoregbe writes, “There are contemporary African philosophers and there is contemporary African philosophy. This means that a course on African philosophy should not be confined to traditional philosophy but should include traditional philosophers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold S. Senghor, Nyerere, and Kwasi Wiredu...There are of course several other professional philosophers in the departments of philosophy all over Africa (1980, pp. 10-11).

In his book, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, Antony Flew says that philosophy consists of argument “first, last and always”, and since there is no argument in Eastern thought (or so he thinks), there is consequently no philosophy for Eastern thought. Placid Tempels also has such pitfall. According to him, “We (the West) can conceive the transcendental notion of ‘being’ by separating it from its attribute, ‘Force’, but the Bantu cannot” (Tempels 1959, pp. 50). Such is the sceptical attitude arising from outside of the African household, which I call a blessing in disguise because it helps in the strengthening and solidification of African philosophical discourse when African scholars reacted to it. Asouzu for instance, calls this ‘Tempelsian damage’ knowing the kind of harm this would do if some African scholars imbibe this thought pattern without responding critically to it. Similarly, Wiredu further argues that African traditional philosophy is termed philosophy only on a generous understanding of the term. Reacting to this, Omoregbe argues, “Professor Wiredu is well versed in Western philosophy, especially the Anglo-Saxon analytic tradition which sees philosophy essentially in terms of logic, analysis, and clarification of terms. This is the impression one gets from his writings. He is certainly one of the leading African philosophers of today and he has contributed a great deal to African philosophy. However, when he says that without argumentation and clarification there is strictly no philosophy, he means Western type argumentation...In the first place, the essence of philosophy is not argument but reflection on the fundamental questions about man or about the universe (whatever form this reflection may take) there is philosophy (1990, pp. 5). Wiredu’s scepticism on the oral tradition through which philosophy was handed down in Africa is worth mentioning. According to him, “you do not go to the aged peasant or fetish priests or court personalities, but to the individual thinkers in person or in print” (47-48). One thing is apparent from all these analyses; that is, what is done in African traditional philosophy is not without value. African traditional philosophy is peculiar; there is a need for fieldwork. “This field-work aims at finding out the reasoning process that led to the views handed down to us by interviewing the old, elderly and the aged” (Omoregbe 1990, pp. 10).

THE INEVITABILITY AND RELEVANCE OF SCEPTICISM IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL ENTERPRISE

Scepticism is not only inevitable but also relevant in African philosophical discourse. Scepticism is not peculiar to any cultural milieu. It touches both Africa and the West insofar as a philosophical enterprise is concerned. Scepticism has really been of inestimable value in the proper identification and advancement of African philosophy. Some of the sceptical views of Hountondji, Wiredu and others as to the question of the authenticity of African philosophy, African philosopher and philosophising within the African context helps African scholars to rise up to the challenge, put on their thinking

apparatus and not only prove the existence of African philosophy and the place of African philosophers within the scheme of things but also begin to codify their views for today and for posterity. Scepticism holds sway even at the level of intercultural philosophy, and this must have prompted Asouzu (2007) to advocate for complementarity in our philosophical quest and argues that there is a tension-laden ambivalent character of our experience of reality. One simply has to be acquainted with a good understanding of African philosophy to grapple with the fact that scepticism is symbolically embedded in African philosophical milieu. Scepticism in Africa matters because it provides an opportunity for African philosophers to raise doubts, make critique and question even their philosophical foundations and thereby making it more solid and raising it to compete within the global terrain of philosophical discourse.

Some scholars construe scepticism and sceptics from the negative perspective. However, I am strong of the view that scepticism is an inevitable, relevant part of philosophy whether in African or in the West, that brings about positive results by way of opening up new vistas and horizons of thought, be it in the area of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, logic, socio-political philosophy to mention a few. If the Western thinkers, for instance, had never reacted to the sceptical positions of Gorgias and the Sophists, their brand of philosophy would have been stagnant, so also is the African philosophers who reacted to the sceptical postulates of Hountondji, Wiredu, Bodunrin and many others. Scepticism is like a force that ignites the fire and activates the philosophical spirit in all cultures of the world, such that when scholars begin to react and respond, new ideas will emerge and novel theories are espoused and the scope of the discourse expands by way of further discoveries. If Descartes for instance, was not sceptical about the method of philosophy on the ground on his arrival at the philosophical rostrum, he would not have discovered his famous *cogito ergo sum*. If Asouzu for instance, was not sceptical about the bifurcating approach to reality initiated by Plato and advanced by Aristotle, he would not have founded and advanced his world-acclaimed *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy. The fact remains that there are lots of humanitarian cum philosophical dividends that accrue from scepticism. In the words of Imoh & Thomas (2015),

Scepticism may seem quite abstract but it has a practical import. In Africa, scepticism has a very strong humanitarian aspect. It is an asset in tackling superstition-based abuses. Sceptical activism entails not only challenging and debunking paranormal beliefs but also extending support to victims of superstitious beliefs. Sceptics care about the truth. They demand evidence. Sceptics especially care for those who suffer due to mistaken ideas.

Another interesting role scepticism has played is that it not only helps in identifying an African philosopher but also in the advancement of African philosophy. If, for instance, Wiredu, Hountondji and other African philosophers did not raise doubts and advance some criticisms against African traditional philosophy, African contemporary philosophy would not have emerged the way it is today. Their sceptical posture on African traditional philosophy, ethnophilosophy, and so forth awoke African scholars from what could be likened to epistemic slumber and therefore they began to react and response to their sceptical stances and criticisms and by so doing expanding the frontiers of African philosophy in general and African contemporary philosophy in particular. One interesting thing is that these indigenous thinkers also refer to the works of other African scholars to instantiate their claims. In line with this, Onah writes:

In this context Wiredu cites approvingly the work done by Oruka in the critical appraisal of traditional philosophy. He thinks it would be a disservice to

philosophy, and also to Africa, if in contemporary Africa, African philosophy is taken to mean simply traditional philosophy. There is no doubt that the experience of colonial humiliation and the mark it has left on the psych of many Africans even after the colonial era have made some African scholars a little over protective of African traditional institutions and restive about any form of criticism of African traditional values (2002, pp. 70).

No doubt, criticisms and counter criticisms as well as strong sceptical approach to African traditional philosophy have paid off. Scepticism has played very vital role in the development of African philosophy and its various strands like African traditional philosophy, ethnophilosophy, African contemporary philosophy and so on. Without raising doubts, making criticisms and critiques of already existing works in African philosophy; it will be difficult to employ African philosophy in tackling problems of the contemporary African society and African philosophical enterprise would not have gained prominence among philosophies and cultures of the world today. Scepticism, critiques, raising of doubts and even positive self-criticisms always help in the solidification of institutions, traditions and cultures all over the world, of which African philosophical tradition is an essential part. As it were, Onah further adds his voice when he holds that,

... any philosophy that as a matter of principle avoids all forms of self-criticism will invariably become stagnant and even dogmatic. Culture is dynamic and the culture in which contemporary African philosophy is nurtured must be contemporary African culture. Else it will not be able to rise to the demands of contemporary African society (2002, pp. 71).

Hountondji, Oruka, Asouzu, Wiredu and other African philosophers firmness in being sceptical about and critiquing some basic issues in Africa like the idea of African traditional philosophy, for instance, and the suggestion on contemporary African philosophy has paid off, and expectedly not without some counter criticisms as it is often the case with philosophy even in the West. Taking Wiredu as a case in point, in his philosophy of human nature still within the context of African philosophy, he makes his agenda known by suggesting that for contemporary African philosophy to thrive, “the critical and reconstructive treatment of the oral tradition and the exploitation of the literary and scientific resources of the modern world in pursuit of a synthesis” (113) must be taken into serious consideration.

Henry Odera Oruka, at the early stage of the debate, did not affirm that there is an African philosophy but chose to designate his *Four Trends in African Philosophy* namely, ethnophilosophy, philosophical sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy. In a note at the end of the essay in which he first proposed these “four trends,” he made a remark which suggested that Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin hountondji, Peter Bodunrin, and himself belong to one “school” (that of professional philosophy), though stopped short of saying so explicitly (Onah 2002, pp. 61). Oruka goes much further to advise scholars to avoid what he describes as an “arrogant claim” of professional philosophy (1991, pp. 49). Advancing his claims on the need to promote a rationalist approach in African philosophy by way of insisting that our beliefs should be anchored on a firm foundation of reason, not in customs and habits, Wiredu claims that that is the most reliable and viable means of facing the modern challenges and coping with the demands of social transformation in Africa. He construes the function of philosophy as a critical examination of “the intellectual foundations of our life using the best available modes of knowledge” (62). Unfortunately, Wiredu failed to take the experiential and psycho-spiritual dimension of the examination of the basis of his definition and function of

philosophy into account. It is so because reason alone cannot hold sway in ascertaining the wholesome proposal made by Wiredu. In all of Wiredu's sceptical approach and persistent critique of the traditional thought, he envisages a new philosophy in Africa that is enmeshed in criticality, reconstructive, painstaking, well harmonised and thorough, and inculcating in Africans "the habits of exactness and rigour in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and experimental approach" (32). Wiredu encourages Africans to imbibe the spirit of scientific acquisition in metamorphosing from traditional to the modern world. In his own words, "For my part, I take science to be a critical factor in the transition from the traditional to the modern world. All developing nations are endeavouring to improve their living standards through the application of science, and any philosophy not thoroughly imbued with the spirit of science cannot hope to reflect this" (32). The new philosophy that is being proposed by Wiredu is such that should be at the service of modernisation.

It is of importance to note that the humanitarian dimension of African scepticism or scepticism in Africa could be an overwhelming - liberating force to those who 'erroneously' give tags to downplay their standpoint on important philosophical matters at the local and global levels. African scepticism has global and domestic imports. At the domestic level using Africa as a case in point, those who have been persecuted by others who do not like their faces tag them and their position witchcraft, for instance, will be liberated when their persecution is critiqued through a sceptical approach. When the oppressor and the reason for his oppression (action) is questioned, critiqued, and criticised, it helps in liberating the oppressed. At the global stage, the other cultures of the world would understand that issues relating to Africa are not fetish and superstitious as they supposed but of humanitarian value when critically analysed because results that accrue from African skepticism can be of help in tackling global challenges.

SOME OF THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH SCEPTICISM

Scepticism whether from the African or Western perspective has some challenges that are associated with it. By implication, scepticism is not without some form of misgivings just like other epistemic concepts and theories. For the dogmatist, the sceptical arguments, regardless of whose they are, pose basic difficulties; and if he sees their relevance to his own views, it is he who must deal with them if he wants to be satisfied that his system is tenable (Zalta et al., 2015). Another challenge that confronts scepticism is that the upholders of sceptical views (systems) have the problem of refuting arguments within their systems irrespective of who posed the problem or whether he believes what he proposes. Adapting from *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Sextus set forth his arguments primarily in terms of stoic and Epicurean views; Montaigne, both in terms of these and of scholastic and Platonic ones; Gassendi, in terms of Cartesian, scholastic, and Renaissance naturalistic ones; Bayle, in terms of the system's current in his day –scholastic, Cartesian, Leibnizian, Lockean; and Hume, mainly in terms of Lockean and Cartesian ones (460). What is apparent from the above is that each sceptic comes up with a position to counter the view of those who came before him and if it is not checkmated it could lead to an infinite regress.

St. Augustine, a great philosopher and theologian from Africa was among the first to raise doubts, ask questions and make strong critique and criticism against scepticism. He was sceptical about sceptics and scepticism. This Bishop of Hippo and multifaceted scholar of African descent argued against scepticism in a work he titled *Contra Academicos – Against the Academy*. St. Augustine defeated universal scepticism as self-

contradictory. Musgrave puts in thus: “Does not the sceptic claim to know that nothing can be known? And does he not try to prove that nothing can be proved? You contradict yourself if you claim to have proved that nothing can be proved” (2005, pp. 19). From another perspective, “Skepticism has been continually attacked and “refuted” in the history of philosophy and has occasionally been set forth as a serious view. Opponents have argued from Greek times to the present that skepticism is untenable and that it flies in the face of common sense and ordinary beliefs. As Hume admitted, one of the characteristics of skeptical argumentation is that “it admits of no answer, and produces no conviction” (Zalta et al., 2015 pp. 459). All these go a long way to show that there is hardly any position or attitude in the philosophy that cannot be challenged, scepticism inclusive.

CONCLUSION

African scepticism is not a figment of imagination; it is not a wishful thought of the non-alphabetically oriented mind, but a reality that is as clear as the daylight. It has been demonstrated that just like there is no culture without philosophy and philosophers, there is also no culture that is devoid of scepticism. Scepticism itself is not only inevitable but significantly relevant in breaking new grounds, opening up new insights and thereby developing and advancing new theories and by so doing expanding the frontiers of philosophical discourse, enriching philosophical lexicon. In the course of articulating these ‘corpus’, references were made to the works of some indigenous African philosophers, and also philosophers from outside Africa proximately or remotely and by so doing extrapolating some of the sceptical dimensions of their views which has in no small measures helped in instantiating the claim that there is scepticism in African philosophy, these scholars also codified their views, and their sceptical positions help African philosophy to thrive. Scepticism is not without some challenges just like every aspect of human endeavour. Prominent among the problems of scepticism is that often scepticism and sceptics land themselves into self-contradiction like Gorgias who said that ‘nothing exists...’ or Makinde who argues that ‘there may be no possibility of having an African philosopher if African philosophy is not written in African language...’ Expectedly, both Gorgias (a universal sceptic) and Makinde (a moderate sceptic) contradicted themselves. One would simply ask Gorgias if you say that nothing exists, do you exist? Definitely, Gorgias once existed in the ancient epoch of Western philosophy. On the other hand, one would ask Makinde, in which language are you advancing your argument, African or Western? Apparently, Makinde argues in the English language that is not indigenous to Africa.

In all these, there is a missing link. This missing link is what I call *African philosophical ecumenism* where reason, experience, psycho-spiritual, socio-political, economic, and cultural dimensions of African experience should play vital roles in grappling with and in solving African problems and thereby extending generous hands of assistance in addressing global challenges. One may question the inclusion of the word ecumenism in philosophical discourse such as African philosophy, but it has to be reiterated that right from the earliest times till this 21st century, no word or concept is new to philosophy as ‘the queen of arts and sciences’. For me, the best way to handle both local and global problems is through the interconnectivity of the resources of both Africa and the West, because no one is self-sufficient left alone; we are all beings of symbiotic nature. This cross-pollination of intellectual and other resources cannot be over-emphasised because even from the point of view of eclecticism, “The school of eclecticism holds that the best approach to an understanding of African philosophy is the synthesis or an

intellectual romance between the Western and African concepts and categories” (Uduigwomen 1997, pp. 6). This should also apply to understanding other philosophies of the world. The idea of superiority complex or what Asouzu calls ‘unintended ethnocentric mindset’ that characterises the West to argue that there is no scepticism from the African point of view is simply dead on arrival. African scepticism is real and has been there and will remain there. What the West and Africa should do is to harmonise the rich sceptical deposits and positions in their cultures, synergise and harmonise them to tackle global and local (glocal) challenges. This will be in the best interest of humanity, showing that some benefits accrue from scepticism, and that scepticism is a reality in philosophical enterprise and also holds way in Africa just as it does in the West.

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