

## **ON WHAT GROUNDS DID WE CONCLUDE THAT CULTURE IS NOT PHILOSOPHY? (Paid)**

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### **Abstract**

*The age-long relationship between philosophy and culture or culture and philosophy has refused to be amenable to holistic and exhaustive interpretation and understanding. There appears to be an agreement among scholars that while culture is inevitable in the formation, formulation and emergence of a philosophy, philosophy-itself, it is argued, is not and cannot be culture. Sometimes, it is put simpliciter as “philosophy can be culture, but culture cannot be philosophy”. This paper sets out to achieve three aims: one, to show that the issue of a culture not being a philosophy while a philosophy can be a culture would collapse if subjected to critical analysis. Secondly, the paper argues that the thesis that “culture cannot be philosophy” was a fallout from what we have come to know as “The Great Debate” on the existence of African Philosophy, it shows how the cause and course of that debate, pursued through radical (re)interpretations and definitions of concepts and terms, resulted in the denigration of Africa’s heritage. After, all, how can a race said to possess “pre-logical mentality” produce a philosophy via a reflection on her history and culture? Finally, the paper submits that the idea of a “cultural philosophy” is actually a tautology since there is no “cultureless” or “uncultured” philosophy, the paper employs expository, analytical, and critical methods and then, via a polemic, the paper argues that when recourse is made to the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of reality and to the history and nature of philosophy itself, the claim that “culture is not philosophy” become both meaningless and insignificant!*

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### **Introduction**

“Let no one when young delay to study philosophy, or when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul” - Epicurus.

Scholarship can a times be hegemonic. How I wish I do not have to bow to the hegemony of citing authorities in this piece, authorities who, from the history of philosophy itself, we have seen are far from being endowed with finality. Quoting the views of some people have become, they say, one of the veritable signs of being “acknowledged”, sometimes “celebrated” as an intelligent person. But is this “natural” intelligence or “bookish” intelligence? Well, perhaps, the editor would throw this piece aside or give my manuscript to those selling “akara” (fried beancakes) unless at the end I have an “impressive” list of certain literatures that are relevant to whatever it is that I want to say in this piece.

When Epicurus made this statement over two thousand ago, I doubt whether by “study”, he meant this “studious”, academic, “school” mentality that we brandish like a cutlass today. But then, it appears we are condemned to study. But what is the import of what I am saying? Well, it is to remind us that those people, those scholars I am expected to either debunk or eulogize their positions (in order to give scholarly respiration to my own) are people who have taken certain positions, made certain claims and/or propounded some theories. These theories are propounded in an attempt to confront certain problems or challenges facing humanity. Now, do not ask me whether the theories have *successfully* confronted (in order to solve) these problems/challenges, because I cannot answer it. These theories are expressed in *sentences* containing *terms* making *statements* that contain *propositions!* In doing that, we rely on certain definitions, that would give anchor to our claims. Unfortunately, whether or not I allow any counter-claim validity, it will come.

In his article, “On Cultural Philosophy”, C.S. Momoh, while concluding his reaction to an earlier presentation by K.C. Anyanwu, writes:

A fundamental prerequisite of the academic tradition is that a scholar must demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the works of his predecessors, if not of his contemporaries, in his area of interest. Proof of this is in the form of acknowledgements, detailed footnotes and references, not just the type of bibliography in “Cultural Philosophy”. There is no evidence in Dr. Anyanwu’s “Cultural Philosophy” that he knows the existing state of affairs in African Philosophy. Thus, his readers are subjected to the intellectual indignity of being fed old ideas as new and novel ones (35).

You see what I mean! I must do all I can to avoid this type of bashing and chiding!

I think by now the chicken is coming home to roost!

What am I expected to say about philosophy and culture that has not been said? But talking about “philosophy” and then “culture” separately may not present as much problem as talking about the two of them woven or integrated together; that is, the relationship between them. What for e.g., does “cultural philosophy” mean? What on the other hand, is the “philosophy of culture”? What are we saying when we aver that “philosophy is (can be) culture” and that “culture is not (cannot be) philosophy”? If we cannot have a universal culture, can we have a universal philosophy/philosophizing? Or does the fact that our philosophy is “from” and “within” a culture deny the possibility of a universal philosophy? Besides, does “Universal Philosophy” mean a “cultureless” philosophy? And by a “universal philosophy” do we mean “the universality of philosophy/philosophy”?

This paper would perform three tasks and then conclude. First of all, it would look briefly at the age-long relation between culture and philosophy with a view to arguing that we have been articulating a “philosophy of culture” to the detriments of developing a “culture of philosophy”. Our second task is to trace and explain the reason for the claim that “culture is not philosophy”. This explanation is found in the debate over the possibility or otherwise of an African Philosophy, which gained currency in the 1970s. The third and final task of this paper is to show that the claim that “philosophy is culture” and “culture is not philosophy” is of no meaning and significance when recourse is made both to the history of philosophy as well as the nature and dynamics of its existence.

The irony is that this paper appears to be gearing up to jeer at the “Philosophy of culture”, yet it wants to advocate a “culture of philosophy”. However, Joseph Agbo, have developed the idea of a “culture of philosophy” in his paper, “The Principle of ‘Refl-action’ as the Basis for a Culture of Philosophy in Africa”. “Refl-action” connotes the idea of thinking in order to do”. But the paper takes this departure because it is precisely through the ability to inculcate a culture of philosophy that the nature of philosophy as a “school” engagement can be debunked. We shall also, in the process posit that it would be inconsistent to admit that we can establish a culture of philosophy and then at the same time admit that “philosophy can be culture”, while “culture cannot be philosophy”.

## **Philosophy and Culture and the Debate Over African Philosophy**

We believe that the hard and fast distinction between philosophy and culture was given a fillip at the dawn of the debate on what does constitute “African Philosophy” (if it *is* at all) and when it began (in the time and in the “minds” of African elders and sages or in the time and “minds” of, say, a Kwasi Wiredu, a Barry Hallen, a Peter Bodunrin, a Paulin Houtondji, a Theophilus Okere, a C.S. Momoh, and an Uzodinma Nwala *et cetera!*). In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx makes a parody of Hegel’s idealistic view of reality, and underscores what we are saying. For him:

For Hegel, all that has happened and is still happening is only just what is happening, in his own mind. Thus, the philosophy of history is nothing but the history of philosophy, of his own philosophy. There is no longer a “history according to the order in time”, there is only “the sequence of ideas in the understanding”. He thinks he is constructing the world by the movement of thought, whereas he is merely reconstructing systematically and classifying by the absolute method the thoughts which are in the minds of all (101).

To say that our actions, our culture, our activities, our words, etc are not “philosophy” (sometimes, even “not philosophical”), but that our “thoughts” on these actions, cultures, activities, etc are philosophy is to utter nonsense! As far as we are concerned, this line of thinking was propelled by the desire (demanded by the exigencies of the time and situation) by the early reflectors on philosophy in Africa, to “prove” to the Western world that “Africans can think”, that Africans are not possessors of “primitive mentality”. So, while we accepted a lot of Western cultures as their (Western) Philosophies, the African had to play “catch up” in rigorous, logical, “rationalistic”, scientific “thinking on paper” to “show” that they could also produce “sophisticated” philosophical works anchored and founded on the systems and methods of “Western Philosophy”! Were we to subject the words we use in fostering the distinction between thoughts and actions, culture and philosophy, into the same critical philosophical fire, we would end up collapsing these distinctions as the postmodernists have been doing.

The pioneering works of the so-called Ethno-philosophers (a term used derogatorily) like Placide Tempels, Alexis Kagame, J.S. Mbiti, William Abraham,

Marcel Graiule, etc, and later disciples like T.U. Nwala, C.S. Momoh, Sophie Oluwole, etc., were decried on the ground that they are mere “cultural” writings. In his paper, “Africa Within the Globe”: Confronting the Parameters of Cross-Cultural Philosophy”, Joseph Agbo wrote that:

The concept of “folk philosophy” has been denigrated because it was assumed to be an unhealthy, perhaps, unnecessary and uncritical backsliding into an anachronistic past, a past in which, as far as these critics are concerned, there is nothing worthy-for-contemporary-life. Folk philosophy is derogatorily referred to as “Ethno philosophy” by critics like Bodunrin, Hountondji; Wiredu, Oruka, etc., because of the communalism implicit in its postulations (193).

It was somewhat okay, perhaps, understandable, for those doubting the existence of what was christened “African Philosophy” to be Ruch, Maurier, Blocker, even Hegel or Hume. But for thorough-bred Africans to argue that their fathers were not philosophers because they were not “systematic”, “scientific”, or “rigorous” (whatever these terms mean in western scholarship!) comes down to only one explanation: indoctrinated colonial mentality! In his survey of the cause and course of what became known as “The Great Debate”, T.U. Nwala, in his book, *Critical Review of the Great Debate on African Philosophy (1970-1990)* writes that:

The debate was largely a classical case of arguing out of ignorance, and that some of the debaters were victims of hidden or limited evidence as well as being victims of what G.G. James called “Stolen Legacy”. These are fallouts of Eurocentricism...[M]uch of the debate involved “arguing out of point”, since the subject-matter, which is “African Philosophy”, was not fully addressed by those who rejected its existence; rather only an aspect of the subject matter, namely, “African traditional Philosophy”, was their main focus as if it is all there is as African Philosophy. The focus on African traditional philosophy is essentially a focus on African traditional cultural philosophy (101).

Nwala, in the above quotation, offers us an explanation and then, in the process (unknown to him) hits at the hearts of the worry (or is it concern?) that acts as the basis for our current excogitations. The original question is not why the

denialists rejected African traditional philosophy; rather, the pioneers question was: why did the ethnophilosophers, as it were, beat a mental and scholarly retreat to pristine African past to un-earthen the philosophy embedded therein?

Do we remember Gene Blocker's 1978 article ("African Philosophy") that appeared in a then University of Ibadan new journal, *Journal of African Philosophical Inquiry*? That paper made a lot of claims via a definition of what is it that is "African" and "philosophy". Blocker claimed that "African Philosophy" is a misnomer since the idea of "Western Philosophy" is actually a tautology since "Western Philosophy" is indeed "philosophy" *as such!* In other words, for "anything" to exist, pass muster as "philosophy", it must have to be "Western Philosophy" or no philosophy at all! Following the claims of other Eurocentricists, racists and colonialists, either in the past or during his days (men like Hume, Hegel, etc), Blocker argued that if "African Philosophy" would ever be meaningfully conceived, it would start and develop from the debate then going on. That is to say, the "coming of" philosophy to Africa has to be historically located at the dawn of Western (colonial) education!

We do not have the space and focus to discuss how Blocker rejected works by William Amo, William Abraham, etc who, though they are Africans, did not produce "African Philosophy". So, the idea that "African Philosophy" was a *recent* phenomenon, which has its progenitor in the (Western) Philosophy brought about by the teaching of the latter in African Universities, mostly by Western or European teachers, led to a nostalgic retreat to the past in search of autochthonous materials with philosophical insight. That was the logic and philosophy behind Ethno philosophy! The burden of proof was shifted to contemporary African professional (academic) philosophers to show that there was philosophy in traditional Africa, unstained by European contact! Of course, many of the items unveiled from this pristine past, whose philosophical contents were analyzed and explained, came from elements that appear heavily cultural - language, history, mores, political organization, religion, etc., and this is inevitable.

The denialists of the existence of African Philosophy wanted specimen of that philosophy when the denial could no longer be sustained. The question became, "if there is an African Philosophy, where is it"? Of course, such questions wanted equivalents of say, Plato's *Republic*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, or Marx's *Das Kapital* etc within the African philosophical tradition, which, of course, were not readily available. And so, African

Philosophy had to be repudiated. In the face of the ferocious debate, distinctions and dichotomies, which I think should have been unnecessary, crept in. You find such distinctions in Wiredu ("African Philosophy as folk thought preserved in oral traditions and African Philosophy as critical individual reflection, using modern logical and conceptual techniques"- in his, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, ix), Nwala ("African Philosophy and traditional African Philosophy"-See his inaugural lecture, *The Otonti Nduka Mandate: From Tradition to Modernity*, 42), etc. The distinction between "thought" and "philosophy", "traditional" and "contemporary" became an issue in the debate!

What is a "thought" and what is a "philosophy"? The argument arose that one can "think" and not be "philosophical" in it, and that "philosophical thinking" is another, perhaps higher level, of "thought", which, of course, one of Europe's celebrated anthropologists, Lucien Levy-Bruhl's characterization of Africans as possessing "pre-logical mentality", has helped to engender! The argument, therefore, became that: in traditional Africa, there was "Thought", but "Philosophy" only arrived on the scene through the ship of colonial Eurocentric education! The issue, for our context, became that: all these "thoughts" from traditional Africa are categories of its "cultural", not "philosophical" elements. Culture, therefore, cannot be philosophy! "Philosophy" here understood as rational (logical consistency!), critical, scientific, systematized thinking! It was this unnecessary distinction between "Traditional African Thought or Philosophy" and "Contemporary African Philosophy", as though the latter exists and the former never existed, that led C.S. Momoh to advocate a "Principle of Periodization", according to which what should be at issue should be the "when" each strand or element of African Philosophy existed, and not whether it existed *at all*.

The distinction is further made between thinking and reasoning, with the argument that the latter is the domain of logic; and since Africans have "pre-logical mentality", they cannot possibly reason. The bizarre conclusion is that relationship between reasoning and logic, finally nails the capacity of the African to engage in the grandiose enterprise baptize with the Greek-derived English word "philosophy".

However, in a recent monumental and controversial contribution titled *Ezumezu: A System of Logic for Africa Philosophy and Studies*, Jonathan O. Chimakonam has argued that there is an African logic that is universalizable. He argues that the traditional, Aristotelian three laws of thought, (Identity, Contradiction and

Excluded Middle), are no longer sufficient to capture epistemological traditions from the Southern hemisphere. He states the kernel of the book in the following words:

My primary aim for writing this book is to unveil Ezumazu as an African-inspired and compatible system of logic with its structure let out of the philosophy of logic, methodology and formal systems. It is my second aim to demonstrate how this logic grounds theories in African Philosophy and Studies, and finally, it is my third aim to show how to solve what I think is the foundational problem of Africa, that is, the operation of colonial curriculum of education based on Western logic foundation. (ix)

At this point, we must make progress, since there are so many highlight in Chimakonam's book that context and space would not allow us to treat here.

### **Between Philosophy and Culture**

The relationship between philosophy and culture has, over the years, been an object of both controversy and symmetry. If this is an introductory piece, I would have started with a separate definition of "philosophy" and then that of "culture". But I will not take that departure. The main purpose of this section is to argue that the distinction usually made between philosophy and culture, with the aim of maintaining that the former can be the latter while the latter cannot be the former, is unnecessary. The claim I am attempting to debunk is rested on one false assumption and one failed observation. The failed observation is that those who say that a culture cannot be a philosophy forget that culture is a "totalizing" concept, and also that the idea of a "cultural philosophy" is at worst unintelligible and at best a tautology, especially when one imagines if there can be an "uncultural philosophy". The false assumption is the one that sees philosophy as having a birthplace, a birthtime and a progenitor. It is the false assumption that, for e.g., imagines that the Bantus suddenly acquired an ontology (philosophy) at the point when Placide Temple's *Bantu Philosophy* was published in 1969.

A critical look at the dominant, popular and available definitions of culture in relevant literature would reveal its close connection and bond with philosophy. I have decided not to include the reflections on culture by such authors as Edward Taylor, Clifford Geertz, John Kluckhohn, B.W. Andah, Sussan Langer, etc, not because they are irrelevant, but because they have been, as it were, "over-used".



In fact, in his paper, “On the Question of Culture: A Critical Appraisal of the Odo and Ezugu Cults in Enugu State, Nigeria.” These authors formed the background of Joseph Agbo’s musings on culture. I shall therefore, look at other positions on culture, which at the end of the day would condense to that given in the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, which sees culture as “[t]he way of life of a people, including their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts, science, modes of perception, and habits of thought and activity” (90). A deep reflection on the concept of “values”, “attitudes”, “beliefs”, and “mode of perception” would betray the axiological and ontological tilt that is not just what we discuss in philosophy, but which constitute the ground for that discourse.

This is why, in *the Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills talks of the sponge-like quality and limitations of the word ‘culture’, perceiving it “in practice [as] more often a loose reference to social milieu plus ‘tradition’ than an adequate idea of social structure” (77). That culture is “spongy” is not in doubt and that accounts for why it absorbs all we do and live by and “stores” them for future generations. In “Can a Work be Both African and Philosophy?”, Jim I Unah considers the age-long dispute that “the cultural trait exhibited by a work seriously erodes its philosophical content...” (43). He obviously agrees with what I said in the “introduction” concerning the motive for the antagonists of the “culture cannot be philosophy” thesis. Unah argues that the perennial concerns of philosophy also occupied the thought of “ancient Africans as encapsulated in myths, proverbs and wise sayings. It is this, that ethno-philosophers have tried to document as philosophical possibilities” (62). He argues that the alleged dilemma created in the conception of a work being *philosophy* and *African* “represents one of those subtle events in the metaphysical tradition calculated to obstruct access to a radical comprehension of African reality” (44). Speaking in the diction of his avowed phenomenological temperament, Unah is simply saying that culture cannot constitute a limited cabin for any philosophy. After all, it is culture that provides the background, the tools and consciousness by and through which philosophy is nurtured.

### **The Idea of “Cultural Philosophy”**

It is important to observe here that the notion or idea of a “cultural philosophy” is tautological, since *every philosophy* is a product, not just *from* but *of* a culture. Whether it is seen as “public” or “private” philosophy (a distinction made by W.E. Abraham in *Mind of Africa*), there is no doubt that no philosophy can be “done”, conceived or presented “unnaturally” – in the sense of not being

circumscribed within or constitutive of a culture. The fundamental place of culture is easily noticed when we remember that we cannot “do” culture the same way we are said to “do” philosophy, for culture encompasses us like our skin. That is why Momoh says that “... the African elder, not the researcher, does not interview people before he discusses what I now designate as Ancient African Philosophy. If, ... philosophy is cultural philosophy, Kant was as versed in the documented German culture as the African elder is versed in his people’s undocumented culture” (35).-

G.W.F. Hegel’s view in the *Philosophy of Right* that the philosopher and, therefore, philosophy is a product of time, makes philosophy a product of a culture. According to him, “whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time, so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes” (11). When the time of a culture is apprehended in thoughts by individuals in that society, this is what we call “philosophy”. Here, Hegel is not describing for us what philosophy “does”, but what it “is”, ontologically: time apprehended “thoughts”. The implication is that philosophy is the historical interaction of Reason within the environment that produces and nurtures the thinker.

Kwasi Wiredu has been prominent in analyzing the complex nature of the concept of culture. But he agrees that there are two major classifications: the contingent and non-contingent. The contingent has to do with procedures, dressing, dance, music, courtship etc. He agrees that some form of cultural identity would be engendered if one changes any of these forms for foreign ones. But he identifies philosophy, science and religion as non-contingent elements of culture where truth is sought. In his paper, “Problems of Africa’s Self-Definition in the Contemporary World”, Wiredu argues that any culture that ignores developments in these 3 areas, in the name of “cultural self-definition” would be playing an undesirable, even if possible, game. For him these “are areas of human experience in which the effects of culture differences could conceivably be eliminated through the peaceful give-and-take of dialogue among cultures” (66).

Here again, Wiredu reiterates that philosophy is one of the components of a people’s culture. The implication is that if philosophy can be (and in fact is) culture and culture cannot be philosophy, the conclusion is reached to the view that *philosophy cannot be philosophy!!!* When we say that “culture is not philosophy”, we oversimplify the fact and forget that what we are saying is

tantamount to saying “philosophy-part-of-culture is not philosophy! We, therefore, need must explain *what* and *which* culture is not philosophy and avoid the blanketness of the comment “culture is not philosophy”. In his well-known book, *Consciencism*, the Pan-Africanist, post-independent Ghanaian leader, Kwame Nkrumah, writes that “philosophy always arose from a social milieu, and that a social contention is always present in it either explicitly or implicitly. Social milieu affects the content of philosophy, and the content of philosophy, seeks to affect social milieu, either by confirming it or by opposing it” (56).

It is important to note that a “culture-determined” or “culture-informed” philosophy does not have to be “culture-bound”. The latter has largely informed the attitude which many people have developed on the relationship between philosophy and culture. For to be culture bound means to “move towards the direction of a specific or specified culture”. And so when people talk of a culture-bound philosophy, this is the impression they create. Yet the direction a philosophy *comes from* (which is what culture does to philosophy) is different from where it is *going to*. In Innocent I. Asouzu’s monumental work, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology*, this understanding and use of the phrase “culture-bound philosophy” is prevalent, especially in discussing intercultural dialogue or prologue. He accepts the distinguishing characteristics of human beings (in opposition to other lower animals) to possess what he calls “... the propensity to produce culture” (52). But I am more interested (for our context) in his correct observation that:

[G]enerally, there is nothing basically wrong in bringing philosophy into close or direct relationship with the relative human condition and with culture or to make it people friendly, if one remembers that a philosopher has to articulate his or her ideas from the preceding conditions of his or her ambience, which is provided by his or her culture, as the sum total of all the actors and factors that enter into his reflection (51).

We may not have time to dwell on Asouzu’s conception of “culture-centered”, “culture-related” philosophy. But the major point is that the relationship between philosophy and culture is indispensable, and that defining and understanding one in terms of the other is a complex nexus of interaction that admits no easy and simple articulation. No wonder Asouzu himself opines that, “any philosophy that does not seek to address reality from the comprehensiveness of its determination and concentrates only in pursuing it

from the relativity of its expression runs the risk of misrepresenting reality in the totality of its self-expression" (56). This "risk" would be a senseless and dangerous one to undertake.

### **On Philosophy, Culture and Society**

The distinction (in longevity and dynamics) made by Theophilus Okere between culture and society must be needless, except it is seen as a mere semantic one. In his *Philosophy, Culture and Society in Africa*, Okere says that "culture is distinct from society. It is society's way of life. Hence society can remain when its culture has changed. Culture is specifically human. It is learned and not instinctive" (37) I do not think that Okere remembers that it is actually the change in culture that brings about or results into "societal changes". And so, the idea of saying that a society "remains" after its culture has changed means that that society has changed. It does not mean that the society continues to exist without culture, for there can not be such a society. The society whose culture has changed does not "remain the same". In any case, a society's culture can only change into new ones, culture does not, as it were, disappear, leaving the society "cultureless" for either a short or long time. No such society can be, or be conceived. This is why Will Kymlicka, in his book *Multicultural Citizenship* argues that a people can "integrate into their culture whatever they find admirable in other cultures" (105). He, however, says that this integration is outside attempt to jeopardize the very existence of that culture from outside or what he calls "the very survival of the culture as a distinct society" (Ibid). This means that no conception of a society without culture is possible. Every culture is a creation of a distinct society and the society cannot be without one.

When Okere sees culture as "a way of thinking, feeling, believing... the accumulated experience, knowledge and lore of a social group stored, for future use, in the memories of men, in books, in objects" (Ibid), are we expected to understand "thinking", "knowledge", "feeling", etc in *cultural* and not *philosophical* terms simply because we did not, for example, use words such as "reason", "epistemology" or "emotivism", respectively in their places? If we grant philosophy its imposing (sometimes, "posing") character and allow it to get involved in its hallowed "busy-body" activity, can it adjudicate in this imbroglio between itself and culture? And will it not be biased when delivering judgment? In other words, can we (plausibly) philosophically look at the relationship between philosophy and culture? And is this "sacrosanct" philosophical-look not another attempt at throwing up certain high-sounding

terms, which give it the toga of “sophistication”? Or didn’t T.U. Nwala, in his inaugural lecture remind us that, “...we have passed the age when philosophy pretended that its words were absolute and eternal, when its view had the status of dogma” (70).

In another paper “The Relation Between Culture and Philosophy”, Okere had insisted that the tool with which the so-called man of wisdom (philosopher) uses to produce a philosophy is Reason! What does someone “reflecting” on (“thinking” about) culture “unphilosophically” do? How does the person do it? Does someone who, outside the established Departments of Philosophy, reflects on culture to the point of acquiring a Ph.D Degree in it, thereby become a “Philosopher of culture” or does he still remain at the “mundane” level of “scholar or academician of culture”? And are we suggesting that such “reflectors/thinkers on culture” employed un-Reason in the process? These questions call to mind the idea of who a philosopher is and what his/her activities should constitute in order to pass muster as “philosophy”. We have noticed that using philosophical terms are not enough. This is why in “Disabusing the Mind of the Prejudices Against the World of Philosophy”, Lawrence Ugwuanyi says that “in contemporary African Society which has witnessed cultural dislocation, more than other sections of mankind, it is common to witness gross lack of sanity in the affairs of the state arguably because of a poor critical approach to life and sheer contempt with the examined life” (7) He regards this condition as a justification for what he calls “a philosophical disposition to life”. For him, philosophy “may well be the beginning of genuine effort to live and answer the call of being human properly” (11).

### **When Philosophy is Not Philosophy**

When we discuss philosophy in “universal” terms and culture in “relativistic” terms, what are we looking for? Are we suggesting that there is a universal philosophy or that philosophizing is universal? If it is the former, then it is outright intellectual bigotry, propelled by colonial logic. But if it is the latter, is it not the same with saying that possessing culture is a universal feature of all societies? Must we have a “universal culture” before we de-relativize the concept of culture? In his “African Philosophy: Problems, Debates, Approaches and Challenges”, Martin F. Asiegbu writes that “[w]here none of the cultural essentials and constituents of a culture make a philosophy, a philosopher, by systematically reflecting on the non-philosophical cultural elements, with a view

to imbuing them with meaning, produces a philosophy. So understood, philosophy involves an orderly, organized, critical reflection on a people's entire experience mediated in their culture" (40-41).

Should we reflect on Asiegbu's reflection on what the philosopher (by reflection) achieves, certain startling conclusions become inevitable: one, that the non-philosophical can become philosophical by the sheer gargantuan "thinking" of the philosopher; two, that a philosophy emerges through the production of some text(s); three, that the philosopher (who obviously was not there at the inception of the people's culture) emerges at a particular time to "imbue" meaning to the hitherto meaningless elements within our cultures; four, that by this "systematic", "orderly", "organized" reflection, the philosopher too is a scientist, but he is a philosopher again via his holistic reflection on the "people's entire experience". Here again, the reality of Placide Tempel's "giving" the Bantus a philosophy in 1969, centuries after their existence, sticks out like a sour throat

In his monograph, *Philosophy Interrogates Culture*. Isaac Ukpokolo, while discussing the adaptive nature of culture, says that it has 3 components: "what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. Thus, mental processes, beliefs, knowledge and values are parts of culture" (22). Commenting on what he calls the "cross-generational aspect of culture" (33), Ukpokolo discusses the "super organic interpretation of culture" (traceable to people like Kroeber) which treats culture as mere abstraction and not a real entity, Ukpokolo argues, in agreement with some anthropologists, that such conception dehumanizes man by denying him "freewill". He posits that only the conception of culture as an objective reality would enable it to retain "the human ability to create and change culture". Now, when we conceive culture in abstractive, objective and mental terms, is it culture that is philosophical or are we, thereby, "philosophicalizing" culture? That philosophy interrogates culture should be no news! After all, it has given itself the task of interrogating other culture-derivatives such as history, religion, language, law, morality, politics, etc. The relationship between culture and philosophy is, therefore, not as sharp as we are meant to believe. For, if there are ordinary and individual conceptions of culture, so has philosophy also acquired a pedestrian sense, whereby it has become a guiding principle/purpose for life.

Although one is not arguing that every element of our culture should be philosophy (whatever philosophy and culture may mean), if philosophy is included as culture (as Asiegbu did in his piece), why then do we reject the

philosophy-content of culture in our blanket expression: “culture cannot be philosophy”? In his paper, “Human Rights, Social Responsibilities and the Preservation of Cultures”, William Sweet notes that culture and cultural traditions “make a truly human life possible” (19). He argues that human flourishing can only occur within a culture. I had noted earlier in this paper that it is because of the inability of imperialists to deny African culture that gave a fillip to the imbroglio between culture and philosophy. If culture provides the context, background, and materials for philosophy, our contention is that there is no reason for this rigid separation. This is why we agree with Sweet that “[u]ltimately, what gives the basis of the value of a culture is its capacity to allow and provide for human flourishing. This is not merely an individual value, but a dominant idea in human consciousness” (29)

There is no doubt that those who treat culture with so much irrationality and “unphilosophicality” do so from a truncated understanding of what it means. The understanding of “culture” as “a way of life” has become the platitude of our recent thinking on the subject, no thanks to the early reflectors on the subject. Many people have not seen culture the way George F. McLean sees it (Oh! Well, do they have to?): as the work of creative human freedom. In his paper, “Person, Cultural Identity and Democracy”, McLean broadly discusses the importance of the values and traditions which each culture transmits, adjusts to and applies commutatively in an attempt to preserve itself through time. For him, “the pattern of values and virtues is the heart of a culture” (88).

Philosophy has often prided itself as “normative”, as dealing with what “ought to be”, rather than “what is” (which is said to be left for science!). Yet, the entirety of the so-called foundation laid for modern philosophy by Bacon and Descartes was an attempt to make philosophy scientific. This “scientification” attempt reached its peak in the phenomenological project of Edmund Husserl. And this is interesting because science, as a separate body of knowledge, came out from philosophy following the centrifugal movement contained in the works of Galileo. Thus, the relationship between science and philosophy is symmetrical and symbiotic. Again, when one remembers the goal of phenomenology (to make philosophy more exactly scientific), one wonders the basis for all these distinctions. Edmund Husserl, in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, jeers at Kant for saying that philosophy cannot be taught. He notes that Kant was right in the observation of the un-teach-ability of philosophy, but goes ahead to tell Kant the reason for that state of affairs: philosophy cannot be taught because

philosophy is not and has never been scientific! Husserl, therefore, argues that true philosophy is science and true science is phenomenology!

If we follow William James' conception of philosophy, then it is the principle of explanation that is the basis for all reality. Yet, we are told that the two main goals of science is to *explain* reality and *predict* the future. What then is the difference? Well, Semanticists will tell us that one explanation is "philosophical" while the other is "scientific". But what is the relationship between epistemology (*episteme*), a major branch of philosophy and *scire* or *scientia*, from where the word "science" is derived? Again, if philosophy cannot be interested in "what is ...", what happens to philosophy's ontology? Isaac Ukpokolo identifies that philosophy differs from other disciplines in "being normative; that is, in trying to distinguish in very broad terms, what 'is' from what ought to be" (6). Unfortunately for culture, it is not a "discipline", but our dear old philosophy is. But who made philosophy a discipline? Reflecting on that which constitutes the basis for all philosophies, that which determines how and what we philosophize on, in a word, culture, it is easy to see that the relationship between culture and philosophy is complex, complicated and complementary. Writing on the values of culture and tradition McLean observes their normative character. (We need must note that culture is more than tradition, because, according to William Sweet, "a culture draws on many traditions" p.20). For McLean, taking his departure from Gadamer's *Truth and Method*:

*Cultural traditions attain their authority not by the arbitrary imposition of the will of forebears, but on the basis of what has been learned from horizontal and vertical experience and passed on. Through history there evolves a vision of actual life which transcends time and hence can provide guidance for our life, past, present and future. The content of that vision is a set of values which point the way to mature and perfect human formation and thereby orient the life of a person. Such a vision is historical because it arises in the life of a people in time and presents an appropriate way of preserving that life through time. It is also normative because it provides the harmony and fullness which is at once classical and historical, ideal and personal, uplifting and dynamizing, in a word, liberating. For this reason it provides a basis upon which past historical ages, present options, and future possibilities are judged (89).*



There seems to be, from the foregoing, the priority and primacy of culture over the “Almighty” philosophy. Indeed, philosophy of infrastructure of disciplines is only possible because of culture. In “On Cultural Philosophy”. C.S. Momoh says that “Philosophy, as an academic discipline has long arrogated to itself the task of peering into any discipline (including philosophy itself) to see what goes on there” (26).

It is at the philosophy of culture that sociology and anthropology, politics and science, language and psychology, history and religion all meet to discuss common issues within a common context, in order to promote the humanity of a specific nation or people. For McLean, to destroy this “in favour of some generic supposedly universal human brand is literally to dehumanize the life of a people and to render it incapable of forming its younger generation” (Ibid). Culture is the “spirit” of a people and to destroy it is to destroy that people! It is also to destroy their philosophy!

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have tried to argue that the idea that “philosophy is culture” and “culture is not philosophy” is not only unnecessary, but also something that emerged in the attempt made to prove the existence of African Philosophy. The image of philosophy as one grandiose enterprise that jumps into an arena where angels are afraid to look and which does not admit “mundane” and “Lilliputian” concerns have helped to foster this claim. This paper has claimed that people have produced “philosophies” that have become the “culture” of the people. Again, it is also a wild goose chase to divorce philosophy from World-view because every society or culture has a “perceptual lens” with which the universe is looked at.

If we remember the theory of “missing-link” in the “complementarist” philosophy of Asouzu, we just realize that culture and philosophy are two sides of the same thing. Also, when we think of the theory or “radical interpenetration” by people like T.U. Nwala, we see that all these distinctions and dichotomies have become moribund. For Nwala, radical interpenetration is an admission that “...the conception of reality has moved from the debate over the primacy of either *mind (spirit)* or *matter*, to the conception of neutral stuff, and further to one in which mind and matter are said to possess similar attributes ...” (30, *The Otonti Nduka Mandate...*)

The truth is that cultures do not just rise and fall; they are sometimes overthrown, sometimes assimilated into higher categories and elements as historical needs demand. These events are not mere chances, they are, many times, orchestrated by rational choices, as in when the people of Neke, Isi-Uzo L.G.A., Enugu State, Nigeria, decided it was time to do away with the Odo and Ezugu cult(ures)! Joseph Agbo has written exclusively on this matter in his book, *Odo Occultism in Enugu State*, while in a paper, "On the Question of Culture: A Critical Appraisal of the Odo and Ezugu Cults in Enugu State, Nigeria", He has discussed the philosophy behind both the emergence and demise of the Odo Cult(ure). If we study the history of philosophy, it would not be difficult to see that it is the (r)evolutionary progress of human cultures. What we regard as the "philosophies" of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire, Franklin, etc have today become the basis for Western culture: a culture of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity (ELF)!

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