



Introduction

African philosophy is a methodical discourse

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All philosophical discourse is methodical. We cannot separate the method from philosophy. The method is a constitutive element of the philosophy discourse. One cannot philosophize without resorting to a method which gives the philosopher the conceptual instruments necessary for the theoretical elaboration of his ideas, the rigorous formulation of his arguments, the logical articulation of his positive, negative or neutral judgments, the objectivity of his view of the different facets of the totality of the real, the orderly development of his attempts to answer his questions about being and non-being, existence and non-existence, the complexity of the universe, the significance of the historical situation of humanity, the conditions of possibility of our scientific and technological knowledge, the ethical values of our social, political and economic life, the search for universal human values, human dignity and the meaning of life and death.

What is the method in philosophy? Professor D.A Masolo, during his conference at the Philosophical Days on Problems of Methods in Philosophy and Human Sciences in Africa in Kinshasa in 1983, took care to introduce his presentation entitled "Methods in

Philosophy and African Identity” by the following definition of the method in philosophy:

Method', from Greek meta (to follow something) and ódós (way, path), is the way by which one proceeds in a research, that is, the set of principles, rules and practical operations an inquiry, resolving a problem and reaching a specific goal. The term “method” may be used in a variety of ways, but it has been used by a certain research, in which case we are able to talk about the Hegelian or Socratic method; or according to the goal of the research, and in this way, we distinguish between the scientific, psychological, pedagogic and philosophical methods; or still, according to the type of practical operation used in a specific type of research such as the experimental and statistical methods.¹

A method, philosophical or not, is a path that leads to a specific objective, the true, the beautiful, the good that one seeks. Francis Bacon compares the method to a breadcrumb that directs our steps in the building of this universe that the human understanding contemplates as a labyrinth. “We need a thread to direct our steps: and the whole road, from the first perceptions of the sense, has to be made with a sure method.”²

In philosophy, the method serves to lead reason in its movement towards the comprehension of the totality of reality. Here is what René Descartes says about this: “Now, by method, I mean certain and easy rules, which, rigorously followed, will prevent anyone from ever assuming what is false, and will make that without consuming its forces unnecessarily, and gradually increasing its science, the mind rises to the exact knowledge of all that he is able to

1 Masolo, D.A. (1983). Methods in Philosophy and African Identity. In Problèmes de méthodes en philosophie et sciences humaines en Afrique : actes de la 7ème Semaine philosophique de Kinshasa du 24 au 30 avril 1983, p. 17

2 Bacon, F. (1620). The New Organon. Published by Cambridge University Press (Virtual publishing, 2000), Préface, p.10.

achieve.”³ For Emmanuel Kant, the method refers to “the way to go about fully knowing a specific object to the knowledge of which it must be applied.”⁴ While Littré⁵ means by method the “set of rational processes used in the search for truth.”

What are the rational processes and rules used by African philosophers in their search of truth from antiquity to the present day? Answering this question in a systematic way involves a systematic study of the history of African philosophy from ancient Egypt to the 21st century to identify the different approaches exploited by Africans in the philosophical articulation of their ideas. Unable to accomplish this project in this special edition of *Nokoko*, we have selected a few methods to introduce this study, which will be the subject of extensive research. By flying over the different periods of the history of African philosophy, we find that each African philosopher follows a well-defined method, with precise rules for the direction of the mind, processes based on well-developed theories, and a command logic governed by objectively established theoretical principles.

As an example, here is how Nkombe Oleko proceeds in the production of his reflexive discourse on inter-subjectivity through a systematic examination of proverbs from the Tetela language. The main thesis of his philosophy is: The proverb gives thought. Like Paul Ricoeur for running a lawsuit that leads from cogito to symbol, and another that leads from symbol to metaphor, Nkombe embarks on the understanding of the *muntu* (human) through a philosophical examination of proverbs. The interpretation of the paremiologi-

3 Descartes, R. Règles pour la direction de l'esprit. Oeuvres de René Descartes. Levrault, 1826, tome XI (pp. 201-329). Quatrième règle. Extrait : « Or, par méthode, j'entends des règles certaines et faciles, qui, suivies rigoureusement, empêcheront qu'on ne suppose jamais ce qui est faux, et feront que sans consumer ses forces inutilement, et en augmentant graduellement sa science, l'esprit s'élève à la connaissance exacte de tout ce qu'il est capable d'atteindre. »

4 Kant, E. (1800). Logique. Traduction de L. Guillermit, Éd. Vrin, 1970, p. 19

5 Littré, P. E. (1863-1872). Dictionnaire de la langue française.

cal symbol brings him to the study of his immanent mechanisms, notably metaphor and metonymy.⁶

Nkombe proceeds in the following way to examine the experiences of emptiness and plenitude in the Tetela proverbs, and to arrive at the speculative discourse on inter-subjectivity: He begins by reproducing the paremiological discourse as it occurs in the culture in question. It is the return to paremia as it is given in its culture.

Here is an example: "Water respects the canoe and the canoe water"⁷ The philosopher then goes to the tropological analysis to understand the nature of the opposition between water and the canoe. Then comes the examination of the inter-paremic relationship between the canoe and the water to discover the meaning of this proverb through the interpretation of both metaphorical and metonymic relation. Between the canoe and the water, there is opposition and complementarity, mutual respect.

The canoe and water represent two different persons in a relationship. Respect is the *sine qua non* condition of a harmonious intersubjective relationship of gift and acceptance. Respect is the distance that the muntu introduces into inter-subjectivity, in order to better value the other and to harmonize freedoms in the search for plenitude, just as in navigation, the movements of the canoe must harmonize. With the waves of waves. Because of the respect, the other as authority is no longer a master, but a traveling companion. In all inter-subjectivity, there is authority, and if it is one-way, it is tyrannical. It is not compatible with freedom and the establishment of an educational circle.⁸

Nkombe thus leads to the reflexive discourse on freedom, authority, the other, mutual respect. To achieve this, the author first

6 Nkombe, O. (1976). Métaphore et Métonymies dans les symboles parémiologiques : l'intersubjectivité dans les proverbes tetela. Présentation par Mgr Tshibangu T. ; préf. de Jean Ladrière, p. 137.

7 Ibidem, proverbes 36, p. 168-169

8 Ibidem, p.169

follows the rules of tropological analysis, then those of paremiological interpretation. His philosophical quest ranges from descriptive phenomenology to reflexive discourse on inter-subjectivity through the interpretation of metaphor and metonymy in paremiological symbols.

In this special issue, we present some methods used by African philosophers. The first text by Professor Okolo Okonda is an illustration of his hermeneutical approach to two fundamental concepts in African philosophy: tradition and destiny. The second text by Professor Biakolo of the National University of Cameroon examines the differences and similarities between the hermeneutical approaches of Theophilus Okere, Nkombe Oleko, Okolo Okonda, and Tsenay Serequeberhan. The third text produced by Professor Jean Bertrand Amougou of Yaounde I, University in Cameroon, gives a systematic presentation of the method of Hebga of the rationality on an African discourse on paranormal phenomenon. The fourth text is a presentation of the inflectional theory developed by Professor Ngoma Binda to critically analyze African political practices and lay the theoretical foundations for the advent of true democracy in Africa. The fifth and final text is a review of a post-modern writing of the history of African philosophy through the grid of neo-pragmatist de-construction of Gregory Biyogo, by Professor Dia Mbwangi Diafwila of Global Scholars International.

From hermeneutics to neo-pragmatic construction of the history of African philosophy, through the new rationality advocated by Hebga and the inflectional theory of Ngoma-Binda, these are the philosophical methods we have chosen to incite philosophers to embark on a systematic examination of the methodological history of African philosophy from ancient Egypt to our time. African philosophy is methodical. In reading the last text of this special issue, you will discover that African Philosophy is not a simple veneration of traditional world visions, but a systematic and methodical research of the meaning of our existence and a quest for being in its

various manifestations. It is not only hermeneutical, but also logical,⁹ dialectical, phenomenological,¹⁰ structural, analytical,¹¹ critical, reflexive, idealistic, poetic, pragmatic, dialectical materialist, neo-pragmatic, ironist, constructivist, de-constructivist, afrikological.¹² African philosophy is very complex and rich in methodological¹³ inventions. Reading the following texts will encourage you to better know and love the study of African philosophy.

9 Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi (2014). Nature and Function of Logic in African Epistemology. Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies Tansian University, Umunya Anambra State, Nigeria. IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 19, Issue 11, Ver. V (Nov. 2014), PP 32-36 e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845. www.iosrjournals.org

10 Henry, P. (2006). *Africana phenomenology. Its philosophical implications.* Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise | Fall 2006. https://globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/wp-content/themes/cgsh/materials/WKO/v1d3_PHenry.pdf. See also Laleye, I.-P (1983). *La restitution phénoménologique, Portée méthodologique pour une pensée africaine efficace*, in *Problèmes de méthode en philosophie et sciences humaines en Afrique*, Actes de la VIIe Semaine philosophique de Kinshasa, 24-30 avril 1983 (*Recherches Philosophiques Africaines*, 9). Kinshasa, 1986, 13-35.

11 Hallen, B. and Sodipo, J.O. (1997). *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

12 Nabudere W.D. (2011). *Afrikolgy, philosophy and wholeness: An epistemology.* African Institute of South Africa.

13 Godwin Azenabor (2009). *Odera Oruka's Philosophic Sagacity: Problems and Challenges of Conversation Method in African Philosophy.* Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK) Premier Issue, New Series, Vol.1 No.1, June 2009, p. 69.

" Various methodologies have been formulated and advanced in answer to the question: what is the appropriate method to follow in order for African philosophy to be valid or authentic? Today, we have C.S Momoh's "Canons of discourse in African philosophy", Barry Hallen's "Cultural thematic", William Abraham's "Cultural essentialism", Kwasi Wiredu's "Renewal or Reconstruction", Olusegun Oladipo's "Method of relevance", Peter Bodunrin's "Universal philosophy", Paulin Hountondji's "Scientific philosophy", and Odera Oruka's "Philosophic sagacity". The term "philosophic sagacity" was coined by Odera Oruka to describe a reflective evaluation of thought by an individual (not collective) African elder who is a repository of wisdom, knowledge and rigorous critical thinking."