

Reconstructive philosophy, not surprisingly, proceeds from the conviction that the real task is to 'make one's philosophic reflection sensitive to the historicity out of which they originate - that is, to resuscitate and explore the concerns grounded in our lived historical existence' (Serequeberhan 1994:9). A philosophy that 'grows from lived African experience' (Bruce Janz 1997:26 commenting on Serequeberhan 1994) is one that '*implicates all theory in its own tradition*' (Janz 1997:234). This is to say, it treats the notion of freedom, for instance, as requiring a 'background of [shared] meaning' (Janz 1997:234) as the necessary condition of philosophical analysis (this being, according to Janz, 'the struggles in Liberia and South Africa...The Mau Mau...Odinga Odinga's *Not yet Uhuru ...*'). Philosophy 'rooted in Africa' as opposed to 'philosophy that happens to be done in Africa' (Janz 1997:235) is 'transferable outside of cultural boundaries' in the specific sense that it is '*irreducibly dialogical*' (Janz 1997:236). While Janz (together with Serequeberhan 1994:53 and Gyekye 1997:24) allows that there is a coherent tradition in Africa's historical life-world which is not by itself a given sufficient for philosophy, he eschews non-African particulars. Serequeberhan (1994:53) wants 'to resuscitate and explore the concerns grounded in ... [Africa's] own lived historical existence'. But the particular - Serequeberhan's 'concreteness of historicity' (Janz 1997:227 citing Serequeberhan 1994), must be complemented by 'the fusion of horizons' (Janz's comment 1997:227-228), i.e. by reinterpretation in conjunctural (transacculturated) contexts (consisting of the 'urban' Westernized African and the 'rural' non-Westernized African, categories created by colonialism).

It is against this reconstructive background that Trompf (1994) applauds Paul Tibbetts' rethinking of the criteria of the rational.

What makes a given BS [belief system] 'rational' is not whether it is falsifiable, efficacious, or even its staying power over time, but whether it can be reconstructed in such a way that the actions associated with the BS are coordinated with antecedent motives, beliefs and intentions - whether latent or manifest (Trompf 1984:509 quoting Tibbetts).

According to Trompf, it is sufficient for Tibbetts that actions 'associated' with a given 'system' be 'coordinated' with motive, intention and other mental states for 'an instance of rationality to be 'produced' (Trompf 1984:509 summing up Tibbetts). The empirical (i.e. not logically necessary) root of this conception is a plural system of coherence which, though communoculturally rooted, has overlapping core-conjunctural scope and hence is a form of transcultural rationality.

There are no basic truths that may be directly, individually and indubitably verified. Truths do not occur in isolation from one another, but in the form of interrelated systems wherein one truth either explains or is explained by (or perhaps both) others. Any single truth that is a component of a coherent system must be consistent with the others. But as any number of alternatives might also be consistent with the overall system, the single component truth selected must 'either explain or be explained in relation to the system *better* than anything which contradicts it' (Hallen and Sodipo 1997:49 citing Lehrer).

In Africa the reconstructive task is problematized by the problem of decolonization: it is to disengage reconstruction from the 'pre-text' of misdirected Western reconstructions - a context in which what is reconstructed remains a part of this context, for what is reconstructed is 'constituted *within* the bounds of that which it challenges (i.e., general philosophy), ... as both the *same* (philosophy) and different (African)' (Outlaw 1987:30-31). The challenge - to show the difference - is not confined to ethno- and sage philosophy, the 'Ur-African' philosophies (Pearce 1994:214), but extends to current schools of thought. The former can be remade by challenging certain readings of anthropological texts on which their reconstruction is based (Pearce 1994:214 accuses Gyekye 1987:189-212 of failing to do this). The latter poses a tougher problem which Robert Bernasconi (1997:188) dubs a 'double bind':

Either African philosophy is so similar to Western philosophy that it makes no distinctive contribution and effectively disappears; or

it is so different that its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt.

2.2 The language thesis

The problem of showing the possibility of reconstructible rationalities becomes pertinent once a distinction is drawn between philosophy and the culturally specific intellectual processes through which people apprehend their world and negotiate their relationship to it. Philosophy distinguished from culture specific disciplines tends to resist fragmentation into geo-economic, social and political centres by local practitioners of the skills of interior reconstruction, mainly because sociological conceptualizations set up a dialogical relationship between the internal content of philosophical argument and the surrounding social world, one which resists writing off such contents as irrational *per se*.

Following Kwame Gyekye (1997:1-34,217-272) and Kwasi Wiredu (1996:81-112) language is one significant medium through which a people's understanding of their world is communicated to themselves and others.

All languages possess conceptual structures peculiar and even unique to themselves, but these structures can be rendered communicable in other languages by dint of the (near) inter-translatability of all languages.

The language thesis is the critical medium of convergence on (contextualised) truth, for language opens rationality to cultural influences. The language thesis strongly suggests the possibility of convergence, yet the historical and social context of reconstruction leaves space for an African voice. This is a consequence of recognizing the role of context i.e. 'the African experience' in philosophy (Gyekye 1997:24-27, Wiredu 1996:104). The question 'Who is speaking?' cannot be bracketed because in the reconstructed sense of rationality at issue here, reason is not a hegemonic force; it yields authority to the identity of the author and her historical, geographical and cultural situation - and even to her mother tongue as carrier of indigenous conceptual frameworks (Wiredu 1996:104).

The question of an African philosophical identity - constituted as it is within the bounds of philosophy being 'the *same* (general) and *different* (African)' (Outlaw 1987:30-31) - existing as part of a larger (converging) discourse, yet remaining (more or less) indigenous - Outlaw recognizes to be 'a function of the historical exigencies conditioning ...[its] emergence' (Outlaw 1987:12). The idea of being both a voice in its own right, yet being that because of its historical situation in relation to a universal dialogue, assumes a discourse which renders the voice audible within the larger setting. Outlaw (1987:10) ingeniously ascribes the audibility of the indigenous African discourses to their being 'enterprise[s] more critically self-conscious of [their] own historicity in ways that inform [their] practices ', which fact makes it possible 'to identify other discursive modalities and traditions as appropriate instances of a refined notion of what constitutes [general] philosophy, especially when these traditions and modalities are situated in non-European cultures'.

Since language is the critical medium for convergence, the language thesis needs a handle on culture-specific particularity and the ensuing diversity. One reaction from Africa - the postcolonial reappraisal of philosophical activity in pre-colonial times - has sought to re-establish ethnophilosophy's link with anthropology. As one of Outlaw's 'discursive modalities' (Outlaw 1987:10), philosophical anthropology plays the philosophical ball with an eye for its relationship to wider social processes, which means that the substantive content of philosophy is re-related to sociology (Wiredu 1980, 1996, Gyekye 1987, 1997, Dalfovo 1992, Okere 1996). Truth, it is agreed, is not a function of a communological reading of culture; a mere internal account of the rationality of some episode of conceptual change in some society is not sufficient. At the very least conjunctural readings are required as the beginning of an approach to the resolution of incommensurables, which is a problem both within discreet matrices and between different ones. Resolvability is impossible in a closed communological context; only the discursive setting of a conjunctural theory, seeking universals in particularity, would suffice as point of departure.

The possibility of convergence assumes that incommensurabilities could not be radical but only benign. Given the developmental sense of convergence

stipulated above, three likely candidates for incommensurability may be identified. Here I follow Mason's (1994:230-238) articulation of classical incommensurability. Beliefs within a particular cultural matrix, and the belief systems of different matrices may be incommensurable on grounds that (i) they rest on different basic or first principles, (ii) embody different norms of rational acceptability, (iii) make claims which cannot adequately be represented outside the frameworks in which they are originally posited. (iii) is unequivocally a problem of the inter-translatability of languages, so I shall deal with it first. The undoubted fact that 'language is a system of skills fundamental to being human' (Wiredu 1996:25), and the postulate of 'a basic similarity of conceptualization among humans' (Wiredu 1996:26), suggest the existence of conceptual (and possibly epistemic) universals and the prospect that inter-cultural communication 'need not always be unsuccessful' (Wiredu 1996:26).

But since, as Wiredu (1996:81-104) argues, no language is fully translatable into another, some conceptual frameworks may be only partially translatable and hence to some extent genuinely incommensurable. There may then be a difficulty in representing the views expressed in one tradition in another. Where a failure of translatability arises, however, there cannot be genuine incompatibility; if two claims cannot be adequately expressed in the same language they cannot be genuinely incompatible or compatible. Consider Tempels's infamous 'Force thesis' - 'Being is force and force is being'. According to Wiredu (1995:174), translation into Akan is impossible i.e. there is no claim of equivalent meaning in Akan.

The thing cannot be done. The thesis cannot be expressed in my language, namely, the Akan language.... In this language, unlike, say, English, there is no such thing as the existential verb 'to be'. The only possible renditions of the notion of 'being' are either predicative or adverbial. 'To be' or 'being' always prompts the question 'To be what, where?' or 'Being what, where?'. The Akan expression for 'to be' is '*wo ho*' or '*ye*'. The word '*wo*' in this context is syncategorematic; it is incomplete, requiring some specification of place, however indeterminate. Thus '*wo ho*' means 'Is there, at some place'. Similarly, '*ye*' cannot stand alone; it needs

a complement, such as in '*ye onipa*' 'Is a person' or '*ye tenten*' 'Is long'. Thus the best that one can do in rendering the existential use of 'being' would be to say something like '*Se biribi wo ho*' which translates back to English as 'The circumstance that something is there, at some place'. Good sense forbids trying to go any further in the experiment of casting 'Being is force and force is being' in Akan.... Whatever it was that Tempels noticed about Bantu thought was radically misstated by the use of an inapplicable Western category of thought, namely, the concept of being as existentially construed.

But even translatable claims can create complications of incompatibility. The word for 'truth' in Akan is '*nokware*'; its opposite is '*nkontompo*' which means lies. But in English the opposite of truth is falsity.

What seems to have happened is that the Akan has correlated the word 'truth' with a primarily moral rather than cognitive concept of truth. The main preoccupation with truth in the traditional Akan society was moral.

Nokware... means literally being of one mouth. Less literally, it means being of one voice. It is sometimes suggested that this oneness of voice refers to communal unanimity; so that the truth is that which is agreed to by the community. Obviously, the authors of this suggestion have failed to distinguish between *nokware* and the purely cognitive concept of truth (Wiredu 1996:105).

Gyekye (1997:158) offers another case of translatability without compatibility. The concept of humanism, for instance, is at home in the context of a community whose primary bond is a shared understanding of the good for man. Gyekye asks what the source of cross-cultural misrecognition is, and explains as follows:

If one were to look for a pervasive and fundamental concept in African socioethical thought generally – a concept that animates

other intellectual ties and forms of behaviour ... and provides continuity, resilience, nourishment and meaning to life – that concept would most probably be humanism: a philosophy that sees human needs, interests, and dignity as of fundamental importance and concern.

This concept as understood in African socioethical thought is not at home in the Western liberal-individualist framework and indeed incompatible with its ethos. When moral claims are framed, as they standardly are, in terms of this humanist framework, their moral import conflicts with claims standardly accepted in the liberal-individualist framework.

Basic or first principle incommensurability is perspective-driven. From the perspective of a person accepting a first principle, she has no further reasons for accepting it and no objection others bring to it count as a reason for abandoning it. Given her set of justifying beliefs and the norms of rational argument implicit in them, there is no rational way shared by others of different justifying beliefs of arguing her out of them. Now, should justifying beliefs also be justified? Are beliefs which rest on justifying beliefs not justified unless the justifying ones are also justified? Mason (1994:232) offers the following line of argument.

A plausible epistemological principle is that *justifying beliefs must themselves be justifiable*. If this principle is correct, then were a belief to rest on basic premises it would lack justification unless these basic premises could themselves be justified. But how could a basic premise be justified if no reasons can be given in favour of it? In order to be justified in believing that p, it seems that one must *have reasons* for believing that p, therefore no basic premise can be justified. This line of argument...seems to provide support for a coherentist theory of justification, according to which a belief is justified provided that it coheres with others.

Justification takes place with reference to a *whole belief set*. If different belief sets did not lack shared standards of assessment, then different first principles would not generate radical incommensurability. If Gyekye

(1997:159,260,289) is right the 'humanist tradition' is an example of a cherished and established tradition in Africa¹, one unlikely to be abandoned as a first principle of the morality of African communities. Communoculturalism - understood as 'a complex of shared meanings that people in a given society derive from or attach to their experiences, the ground by which they understand themselves and interpret their experiences' (Gyekye 1997:107) - it is true, blunts the edge of the possibility of inter-translatability, since incommensurability in the sense at issue is in part at least a function of the normativity of communoculturalism. Normativity is, as Gyekye's case of the 'humanist tradition' illustrates, one obstacle to dialogue between traditions. If a particular tradition carries considerable 'normative weight' - weight being a function of normativity (Gyekye 1997:229) - the 'adaptive capacity' (Gyekye 1997:224) of a culture may be compromised, i.e. it may be difficult if not impossible to abandon an established tradition and 'rationally reground' (Gyekye 1997:228) an alien alternative or simply find some accommodation between them.

Incommensurability also arises from different conceptions of rational acceptability. This source of incommensurability reduces to basic or first principle incommensurability if these principles are understood as norms of rational acceptability (as Gyekye, for instance, at times understands them). But more is involved here. In summary, conceptions of rational acceptability involve not only observance of the laws of logic, but also criteria of acceptability which variously emphasize and give different weights to things like scope, fruitfulness, staying power over time, simplicity and explanation. Coherence all too easily in practice develops a plurality of systems, all purportedly true and efficacious from the standpoint of explanation i.e. offering a purported maximum of explanatory coherence. We have a problem of inconsistent systems: those which attribute great weight to fruitfulness regard the acceptance of a belief system as rationally justified that another which attributes great weight to simplicity do not.

¹ Gyekye's arguments at this point assumes that his notion of an 'Africanness', a meta-communoculturalism, is common to all Africans. See note (7) below.

Gyekye (1997:227) argues for the possibility of an overlapping consensus. A conjunctural account of culture, as explained above, denies that 'the elements of a people's tradition are all autochthonous in their genesis'. Though the 'humanist tradition' in Africa disrupts attempts to marry tradition and (Western) modernity, and though the first principles of this tradition reinforce incommensurability in the second sense (the strain being due to attempts to reconstruct rationality so that the belief systems of the alternative structure cohere internally with established beliefs), Gyekye (1997:32-33,273) endeavours to show that incommensurability in the first and second senses are not radical. For Gyekye the undoubted fact of a 'common humanity' provides 'some justification for believing in a core of common or universal ideas and values'. The core consists of 'essential' universals which were once 'contingent' ones. Contingent universals are cultural products that have 'a specific cultural or social origin', but which acquire the status of essential universals in time, 'as peoples outside the cultural origin of the idea or value ... accept, appropriate, and exploit ... [them] for their own purposes'. The particularity of the social and cultural experiences peculiar to the African people are not lost in the move from contingency to essentialism, which means that neither first principles nor norms of rational acceptability need be sacrificed, for there is in principle nothing which prevents them from being of a sufficiently high degree of generality to be communicated to and understood in other cultures, and then either to be accepted or rejected.

2.3 The social thesis

2.3.1 *Between the universal and the particular*

The language thesis determines that the belief systems at issue in reconstructible rationalities cannot be exclusively either universalisms or particularisms. In conjunctural settings they are treated as universals in so far as the coordination of actions associated with antecedent mental states in one belief system in one culture are tied - through transacculturation - to coordination (of actions with antecedent mental states) in a *similar* belief system of another culture. They are particularities in the sense that the coordinations at issue are deeply tied to communities and their particular

life-views, common ways of acting and shared inherited backgrounds. There is in this context no space for a single hegemonic epistemology. As a general theory of truth coherence has a place only to the extent that transacculturation is more or less successful. The more successful, the more parties from different cultures are able critically to talk about their differences, which means that relativisms (even if only benign) diminish. Less successful instances undercut recognition of a common humanness and of the significance of borrowed cultural products for an understanding of this commonality.

This in-between position presents problems for reconstructible rationalities. Janz (1997:222) argues that a problem arises because it is difficult to know what the particular of the concrete might be from which a reconstruction is to be done, since reconstruction works not from individual but rather from 'shared experience'. Shared experience, 'cannot simply be generalized from simpler units, because that does little more than establish a reductionist method which philosophizing from particulars is meant to overcome' (Janz 1997:222). A second problem concerns the failure to represent all human experience, since generalization proceeds 'from one point' and usually 'coercively' (Janz 1997:222, 223) which cannot accommodate every 'particular lived situation' (Janz 1997:223). Somewhere between the uncertainty of knowing whether or not 'the lived situation has been reached by the theory' (Janz 1997:223), and the uncertainty engendered by theory divorced from practice, a coherent certainty awaits discovery.

Okere (1983:82), like Gyekye (1997:24), discovers coherence and certainty in a starting point in the non-philosophical, ur-African features of the African experience - 'an autochthonous philosophical canon, unsullied by Christian, Islamic, or Western scientific thought' (Pearce 1994:214 commenting on Gyekye 1987). Contemporary African philosophy grows within the bounds of a dialogue which threatens to absorb the ur-African identity, and yet which marks it off as different. The tension between the threat of extinction and the drive for survival creates a space for reflection on itself, a way of foregrounding the prejudices of its claim to difference. The benchmark is the link the notion of 'experience' establishes between

culture and philosophy. Janz (1997:230 commenting on Okere 1983), suggests that the task before the philosopher is to 'interpret a tradition' as a way of reconstructing the 'something present in the [lived] African experience that must be explicated' (Janz 1997:226).²

Mediating between 'lived conditions and theory' (Janz 1997:233 citing Okere 1983 and Serequeberhan 1994), along the route of interpretation, is not 'universalist rationalization' (Janz 1997:227), and should be understood in two senses which - as Gyekye (1997) and Wiredu (1996) would agree - sums up what it means to occupy a position between the universal and the particular, one which excludes Marxism and Liberalism on the one hand (Hountondji 1983a, Appiah 1992) and African essentialists (Mbiti 1970) on the other as instances of philosophizing on 'non-African terms' (Janz 1997:226). The first sense states a relation of theory to the concrete particular: African philosophy 'implicate[s] all theory in its own tradition[s] [of reasoning]' (Janz 1997:234) i.e. subjects it to the variables of circumstance and history. The second sense concerns a qualified relation of theory to the universal: African philosophy 'must be transferable outside of cultural boundaries, and must be able to critique a culture rather than simply reflecting the views of that culture' (Janz 1997:236). The qualification 'universal' is significant. It must be taken to mean no more than that African philosophy is 'irreducibly dialogical' (Janz 1997:236), thus remaining within the ambit of a reconstructible conception which stays in touch with the social processes brought about by the continuing hybridization of Africa's cultures.

2.3.2 *The reach of tradition*

A philosophy 'rooted in Africa' will be one whose traditions 'inform' it, and whose 'object of study ... [is] human experience as it manifests itself and as it comes to self-understanding' in a postcolonial sense of modern (Janz 1997:235). How does tradition 'inform' this 'object of study'? Which traditions? Whose modernity? Identity is one critical theme in post-colonial

² Janz (1997:226) refers to this as an 'hermeneutics of trust'.

African philosophy, and discourses on identity have taken the form of the deconstruction of ideologically inflated Eurocentric representations of the colonized African as the 'Other' - representations widely held to sit at the root of Africa's preoccupation with reconstruction. Pearce (1994:214) observes that Gyekye (1997,1987) 'worries about excavating an autochthonous philosophical canon, unsullied by Christian, Islamic, or Western scientific thought' in an endeavour to reconnect pre- and post-colonial African philosophy through the unifying notion of 'the African experience' (Gyekye 1997:25-26,31-32). Masolo (1997:295) observes that even Kwame Appiah (1992), echoing Gyekye, is aware of an 'identity'-lacuna in the colonized African's thought:

To speak of an African identity in the nineteenth century ... would have been 'to give to aery nothing a local habitation and a name'. Yet there is no doubt that now, a century later, an African identity is coming into being (Masolo quoting Appiah 1992:74).

The fact that Western philosophers have constructed cultural and social images of Africans as 'others' which have no references other than the West's colonizing intentions, has created the need to confront 'generalization as a discourse method' (Masolo 1997:294). Generalization as method in colonial discourse has required that diversity be discarded - a consequence, no doubt, of ideological intention to construct a monolithic African 'other'. Yet, observes Masolo (1997:296), generalization need not create false abstractions about identity. Wiredu (1997) has shown a way

in which cultural diversity is not seen as a hindrance to the possibility of a *tradition* of practice among African philosophers... . One way of understanding the semantic of the supranational idiom 'African philosophy'... [is to see it as referring] to a body of practices without suggesting the existence of elements of sameness either in the practices or in the expressions of tradition which organize the different ethnic cultures ... [African philosophers] reflect on.

Misleading abstractions, the 'imaginaries' of colonial discourse, have overwhelmed the 'real' - a consequence of Western scholarship manipulating 'the imaginaries in order to effect *real* experiences of real individuals' (Masolo 1997:298). This misdirection or victimization, brought about by the postulation of erroneous senses of identity, is symptomatic of the neo-colonial hegemony of Europe over Africa which reinforces the false reality of the African identity constructed out of notions of a 'subjectless unity ... the unanimity and sameness of all Africans' (Masolo 1997:291) - a legacy which Masolo, following Appiah (1992:74), dubs 'our disabling universals'. Witness how ethnophilosophy suffered disablement in a process in which 'real individuals' were replaced by 'real collectives as cognitive agents', the unreality of which is obvious at a glance: collectives do not 'reflect the social experiences of single subjects' (Masolo 1997:291 agreeing with Gyekye 1987:44-51).

The appearance, taken for real, of a lack of 'inter-theoretic competition in the traditional setting' (Gyekye 1997:45 quoting Horton 1984:227) is a consequence of the oral tradition in Africa. But this does not mean that unwritten traditional sources are collective in the sense of being an intellectual product of the collectivity - a kind of "'think" together and think the same thought ... [as if] individuality is completely absorbed in the communal apparatus' (Gyekye 1987:46). Pearce's (1992:450) now infamous 'sociological thesis', formulated as the claim 'that knowledge not only originates from, but is constituted by, its social, linguistic, or cultural origin' falls victim to the trap of treating the African *ethnos* 'as if it were a "real" and unified agent' possessing a 'monolithic identity' (Masolo 1997:288,291). *Contra* Pearce -

the ethnophilosophical theme of the social embeddedness of the subject [which Pearce treats as a *surrender* of philosophy to sociology] is an examination of the claim ... of the *necessary relations* between specific historically conditioned social structures and the 'abstract' nature of disciplines [like philosophy] (Masolo 1997:289. Emphasis added).

Ethnophilosophy seeks to impose 'an alternative order of practice on the discipline of philosophy' (Masolo 1997:289), positing a view of its identity as a product of the social environment, containing categories of 'inclusions', 'exclusions' and 'undecidable hybrids' (Masolo 1997:288). Pearce's order of practice has a grip only on one side of a relation, linking philosophy 'necessarily to a history of *autonomous* intellectual problems *independent* of society, politics and economics (Pearce 1994:204). Ethnophilosophy has a grip on the side Pearce wishes to exclude and relegate to anthropology and sociology. Its grip on Pearce's side, however, is exactly the part obscured by misdirection of the kind under consideration. Deconstructing the misidentity which this misdirection brings on frees the mind from prejudice. As Janz (1997:235) will have it, 'any ... theory must critique its own tradition, and to do that, it must admit that it has one'. Ethnophilosophy, though submerged in communological readings of culture, is undeniably a tradition of the history of African philosophy, to which the post-colonial tradition is necessarily indebted.³ Moreover, '[p]hilosophies will have some points of contact outside of themselves, and philosophers can build on the rootedness in a particular culture to dialogue with and critique the philosophies that arise in other cultures' (Janz 1997:236). In deconstructing oppositions between the 'particular' and the 'universal', 'interiority' and 'exteriority', 'immanent' and 'external', the post-colonial tradition of 'professional' philosophy (Wiredu 1996:145) reads culture conjuncturally, for only on this reading is it possible to understand that reconstructible rationalities are rationalities in a broad sense, including instrumental and justificatory senses.

Janz's line of reasoning brings me to a formulation of the social thesis:
Any adequate philosophical thesis is also an adequate cultural and/or social thesis, which by their very nature as conceptual theses have transcultural conceptual import, i.e. they do not remain restricted to the milieu in which they originated.

³ See especially D.N. Kaphagawani 1998.

This thesis has powerful normative content: it offers a developmental view of the history of philosophical thought - 'developmental' in the sense that philosophical thought changes as the social conditions from which it arises undergo change, transforming and replacing theories advanced at any one time with 'better' alternatives.

3 Four poles of opposition: Gyekye, Wiredu, Hountondji, and Appiah

The closer a particular tradition of reasoning identifies itself with the cultural milieu in which it arose, the more intractable the problems of incommensurability in its various guises become - or so it seems. The further a tradition distances itself from its cultural genesis the greater the possibility of rational resolvability becomes - or so it seems. Just as there is no 'obvious' (Appiah 1992:135) answer to the question 'whether it is possible to adopt adversarial, individualistic cognitive styles, and keep, as we might want to, accommodative, communitarian morals' (Appiah 1992:135), so it is not obvious - even if 'modernization is conceived of, in part, as the acceptance of science' - that the 'evidence obliges us to give up the invisible ontology' (Appiah 1992:135). It is not obvious that a 'limitation of the domains in which it is permissible for intellectuals to invoke spiritual agency' (Appiah 1992:135-136) would help to resolve incommensurability in moral-political spheres let alone cognitive ones. The choice of a modernity - one containing 'technologicalization' as a non-negotiable - is Africa's choice. Gyekye (1997:289) believes 'technologicalization' should be possible without losing 'the humanist essence of...[Africa's] cultures' (Gyekye 1997:289). Indeed this issue is a non-negotiable: 'The value of concern for human well-being is an intrinsic, fundamental, and self-justifying value that should...be cordoned off against any technological subversion of it' (Gyekye 1997:289).

3.1 Kwame Gyekye: reconstructing rationality from 'the African experience'

The middle ground - between the universal/particular, internal/external and interior/exterior dichotomies - is the springboard of Gyekye's thought and

the space he exploits to argue his central theme - 'the *relevance* of the philosophical enterprise to human affairs and to the development of human culture' (Gyekye 1997:5). For Gyekye 'the philosophical enterprise' is 'a critical and systematic inquiry into the fundamental ideas or principles underlying human thought, conduct, and experience' (Gyekye 1997:5). To avoid misinterpretation he adds qualifications paradigmatic of the middle ground: 'philosophy is a conceptual response to human situations or basic human problems that arise in any given human society in a given era' (Gyekye 1997:16). A 'conceptual response', however, cannot be undertaken in isolation from a context - social, cultural, political - and is best given within and with reference to the specified context; indeed, such a response takes the form of a contextualised inquiry '*about* experience' (Gyekye 1997:7), the aim being to provide 'conceptual interpretation and analysis of ... the *African experience* ... not only by responding to the basic issues and problems generated by that experience but also by suggesting new or alternative ways of thought and action' (Gyekye 1997:24).

3.1.1 *Embedded rationalities*

The particularist thesis, opines Gyekye (1997:31) - that truths are relative and relevant only to the times and cultures out of which they emerged - 'cannot be set aside cavalierly' (Gyekye 1997:31), and the universalist thesis - that truth has transparticular applicability - 'cannot ... be unqualifiedly true' (Gyekye 1997:30). The former falls short in that it fails to account for the historical fact of cultural borrowing because it posits a restricted and misleading communological epistemology; from the true thesis that our cultural and historical experiences provide the setting for our conceptual exploration, it erroneously maintains that those experiences are fixed horizons which limit the relevance of our insights to the given setting. The latter falls short in failing to account for the diversity of philosophical inquiry: 'If ... the subject matter of philosophy is human experience, and human experiences differ ... then we would expect the contents and concerns of the philosophies produced by thinkers with different cultural or historical experiences to differ' (Gyekye 1997:31).

In the middle ground reconstructible rationalities are species of embedded rationalities. Gyekye's account of their possibility has two crucial features. The first concerns the non-autochthonous feature of human culture and the possibility of core universals. It is not true, opines Gyekye (1997:227), 'that the elements of a people's tradition are all autochthonous in their genesis'. All cultures contain to some degree 'undecidable "hybrids"' (Masolo's expression 1997:288), alien elements assimilated as a consequence of convergence and the essential openness of cultures (Gyekye 1997:33). The possibility of convergence hinges on the possibility of inter-translatability: Though languages 'embody philosophical perspectives' (Gyekye 1987:31) and though it is true that the historical-cultural meanings of these perspectives are 'sufficient evidence of their particularity' (Gyekye 1997:28), any philosophical thesis, if it is a philosophical thesis, must be of a sufficiently high degree of generality to be debatable in any language (Gyekye 1997:273) i.e. they are in Janz's turn of phrase 'irreducibly dialogical' (Janz 1997:236). Specific cultures spawn specific philosophical theses, but nevertheless there is a body of philosophical thought which has become 'metacontextual' (Gyekye 1997:33) in virtue of contingent universalisms (culture-specific theses) becoming essential ones⁴ (transculturally significant) because of their 'historic significance or relevance or functionality or power of conviction or some such quality' (Gyekye 1997:32). Essential or core universals are theses common to all humanity, universals rooted in the convergence of humans' understanding of a core of philosophical propositions (Gyekye 1997:273). Indeed, the current global domination of European philosophical thought is explained with reference to the genesis of thought in cultural particularity - a 'vertical' - becoming 'horizontal' - i.e. gaining cultural currency across all boundaries (Gyekye 1997:33; Gyekye 1987:191)⁵. Communological readings of culture are by themselves not sufficient contexts for conceptual analysis; conjunctural readings must supply the deficiency, and the success or otherwise of reconstructing rationality will depend on the 'adaptive capacity' (Gyekye 1997:224) of competing cultures to 'rationally reground' (Gyekye 1997:228) their borrowed elements. Conjunctural readings of

⁴ See note (7) below.

⁵ Horizontals are essential universals.

culture offer a suitable setting in which to show how the rationality of traditional belief systems may be recovered (Gyekye 1987:xvi-xxiii, 24-29; 1997:217-232), and lay the foundation for a recovery of Africa's pre-colonial philosophical tradition.

The second feature touches on Janz's (1997:234) notion that all philosophical thought implicates itself 'in its own tradition'. Ethnophilosophy, often denigrated for its 'subjectless unity' (Masolo 1997:291), is the product of *individuals* whose real identities have, due to a lack of records, fallen into oblivion' (Gyekye 1987:xix) though their thought - collectively called the 'traditional African mind' - is a function of 'unconscious social or cultural influences and experiences that to a great extent determine ... the intellectual bent of an individual thinker' (Gyekye 1987:27). Gyekye sees no problem in arguing that ethno-philosophy, stripped of the Western metaphysical impositions which have created the myth of monolithic thought, is grounded in adversarial traditions which encourage conjunctural interpretations of culture. The picture, then, of monolithic communological groupings happily existing in an unanimity of belief and opinion, is false - there never was an ethno-cultural group whose social life was completely integrated and dominated by a single belief system (Gyekye 1987:45).

For Gyekye philosophy ultimately has a utilitarian social point. It is therefore not surprising to discover that his approach to reason is instrumental and a form of motivational internalism. This is the position that an agent has a reason to do x if x is connected, *via* correct deliberation, to some internal feature of the agent (e.g. a belief). If Gyekye is right autochthonous African languages embody worldviews and concepts different from those embedded in other languages. The authority (obligatoriness) of a reason for action is therefore explained by appeal not only to the biological but also the social origins of the norm which encapsulates it. As culture-dependent norms they derive their authority from a societally shaped sensibility - a felt obligation to act in a certain way. A norm has psycho-social authority when the account of the obligatoriness of its reason to act appeals only to contingent facts about the society and the people who endorse it. The norms of instrumental reason

qualify as potential, essential or core universals by virtue of a second leg of their grounding in the biological sameness of humans. None are culture-independent in the sense that they hold necessarily regardless of psycho-social contingencies.

The normative version of instrumental reason which Gyekye endorses embraces some components of a (communitarian) conception of the good. According to this conception an identifying community determines the sort of preference that can or cannot be included in an agent's good-defining set (the set which expresses her ultimate ends and in terms of which she rank orders and justifies other preferences). To this extent the content of an agent's good is minimally specified. Thus when an agent reasons - along 'best-means-to-an-end' lines - she reasons with respect to her preference set which constitutes her good, but what she prefers is not defined by her reasoning except insofar as that reasoning causes her to acquire (current) preferences by identifying her justified/considered ends. The crucial benchmark of rationality, *viz* 'coordinating' actions with 'antecedent motives, beliefs and intentions' (Tibbetts 1983:480), is not in doubt; only the extent to which unconscious social or cultural influences inform them, and, in what sense.

The claims of communality and individuality have 'equal moral standing' i.e. are 'equiprimordial' (Gyekye 1997:41), but the cultural community and its traditions 'must be held as prior to the individual' (Gyekye 1997:40) in the sense that the social context is formative. Gyekye (1987:27) believes that mind is the product of unconscious social and cultural experiences that determine the intellectual dispositions of individuals. The capacity to choose⁶, however, which Gyekye designates a 'mental feature' of the human psyche (Gyekye 1997:53), is not 'created by the community. The community only discovers and nurtures it. So that if the mental feature plays any seminal role in the formation and execution of the individual's goals and plans, as indeed it does, then it cannot be persuasively argued

⁶ Strictly, the capacity to choose is an 'essential universalism' 'common to all humans' and nurturing this trait is common to all human cultures. Gyekye thinks that human society cannot be possible without this cultural fact. See Gyekye 1997:32.

that personhood is *fully* defined and constituted by the communal structure or social relationships' (Gyekye 1997:53). Subjectivity is then never wholly a function of intersubjectivity, though it is socially - not ontologically - necessarily a product of the commonality. This social aspect of subjectivity, nurtured (as it were) by the commonality, sits at the heart of an essential trait of African cultures, *viz.* their humanist morality (Gyekye 1997:158-162, 259-260, 287-290).

3.1.2 *Humanism - the source of good-defining preferences*

Among African philosophers Gyekye is the strongest advocate of the equation between ethnophilosophy and philosophy (1987:76-84). Criticism cannot 'subvert it root and branch' (Gyekye 1997:222); 'the whole legacy of a past [cannot] be disavowed - all in one sweep and at one time' (Gyekye 1997:223). Given Gyekye's recognition of ethnophilosophy as philosophy, and indeed as the tradition of African philosophy in the pre-colonial epoch, in the sense in which he wishes to recognize it as the work of individual thinkers, he is committed to an intimate relation between philosophy and culture. 'Philosophy is essentially a cultural phenomenon: it is part of the cultural tradition and experience of a people' (1987:43). 'The relationship between philosophy and culture is the pivot on which my thesis regarding the nature of African philosophy turns' (1987:25). This is that a 'tradition of [modern] philosophy in Africa will be established only when modern African philosophers engage on the field of African conceptual schemes' (1987:37) to produce a philosophy that 'reflects, or has its *basis* in African experiences, thought categories and cultural values' (1987:33), as the ethnophilosophers had done.

Humanism, 'whose central focus is the concern for human well-being' (Gyekye 1997:260) is social and not individualistic; it is a legacy of the traditional setting in Africa, the subject matter of much of ethnophilosophy and the moral genesis of communitarian social structures (Gyekye 1997:162). It is crucially important to Gyekye's (1997:289) conception of

a modern 'Africanness'⁷ that communitarian values do not 'succumb to technological or industrial changes', indeed, that it should be possible for 'the African people to embark on the "technolocalization" of their societies without losing the humanist essence of their cultures'. For the different idea of philosophy in Africa arises from the (supposedly) different *content* of the African experience, a view echoed by Keita (1990:208,214-215). The springboard of contemporary African philosophy is to be found in 'the supposed qualitative gap that existed between European and African modes of thought' - in the belief that 'rationality and reflective thought are not synonymous with the African thought'. Deconstructing the alleged gap demonstrates the 'historical role of philosophy in Africa'. Philosophy 'derives its value according to its perceived usefulness', and may be identified with 'any set of ideas that seeks to explain the world in terms coherent, understandable and empathetic to interested parties, groups or classes in society'. The utility function of philosophy⁸ has to be measured against its role as a 'device which served and serves practical social needs' (Keita 1990:214) - a service vital for the growth of a developmental conception of philosophy and the concomitant idea of a reconstructible

⁷ 'I believe that in many areas of thought we can discern features of the traditional life and thought of African peoples sufficiently common to constitute a legitimate and reasonable basis for the construction (or reconstruction) of a philosophical system that may properly be called African - African not in the sense that every African adheres to it, but in the sense that that philosophical system arises from, and hence is essentially related to, African life and thought. Such a basis would justify in terms of "African philosophy", just as the similarities of the experiences, traditions, cultural systems, values, and mentalities justify the appropriateness of the labels European philosophy, Oriental philosophy, Western philosophy, and so on' (Gyekye 1987:191. See further Gyekye 1987:191-212).

I have made such observations as the following ... that in the light of our common humanity and the essentialism that this seem to involve, there is some justification for believing in a core of common or universal ideas and values - a distinction, is made, however, between essential and contingent (or functional) universality; that, even though a cultural product has a specific cultural or social origin, given our common humanity, it can nevertheless be said to be a creation generally for humankind as such; that in consequence of the very last observation, values and products of what might be regarded as alien cultures; that, even though modernity developed from Western cultures, its products have become the common heritage as such; and that, despite the important characteristics of Western modernity, not all aspects of it are necessarily attractive to non-Western cultures. These observations and others related to them constitute the background and homework for the discussion of the phenomenon of modernization in Africa - of what should constitute the important features of African modernity' (Gyekye 1997:273. See further Gyekye 1997:207-271).

⁸ Towa (cited in Keita 1994:196). The effort that must be made to shift the debate to methodological considerations must satisfy two main objectives: 'to seize the thought of Africa, to construct its history... to submit our actual problems to philosophical investigation'.

rationality⁹. Dugald Campbell (1922), says Gyekye (1997:236), discovered Africa's 'rational ethos' in the utility function performed by a 'social status of equality observed by the primitive people of mankind', which is 'now the aim and ambition of the most highly civilised communities' (Gyekye 1998:238 citing Campbell 1922:44). The practice of equality is a 'worthwhile ... product from the cultural past' (Gyekye 1997:234) which illustrates the way in which rationality is embedded in moral traditions, and expressed and enacted in a practice regulating inter-personal relations.

Just as philosophy in the West has been instrumental 'in shaping the ideological and technological outlook of that ... civilization', so professional philosophy in Africa will shape Africa's choice of a modernity. 'Modernization' must, however, not be taken to mean 'Westernization' (Gyekye 1997:274), i.e. it 'cannot simply mean industrialisation or becoming technologically advanced' (Gyekye 1997:275) as this has manifested itself in the West in terms of social life 'antithetical to natural human sociality ... causing an atomization of human society, a weakening of social ties, and a fragmentation of social moral values' (Gyekye 1997:275). 'Modernization' must proceed on Africa's terms - in terms of its own 'innovative ethos' (Gyekye 1997:280), which Gyekye (1997:280) identifies as 'the [many-sided] furnace of the African cultural experience', 'many-sided' in the sense of having sprung 'from the encounters with alien cultures and religions and from problems internal to the practice of the indigenous cultural ideas and values themselves' (Gyekye 1997:280). African modernity awaits the outcome of this melting pot; the evolution of the socio-political theory which 'integrates the values of individuality and community' (Gyekye 1997:288), such as the theory he (Gyekye) presents, as a necessary pre-condition of Africa's renaissance. Gyekye's awareness of a choice between modernities reflects Serequeberhan's (1997:144-46) concern with a 'pre-text' in philosophy 'flatten[ed] of all difference', which threatens to take Africa off the global philosophical map. In Gyekye's nativist terms discourse about the future shape of Africa's traditions are

⁹ See again note (7) above.

inseparable from Africa's cultural experience - i.e. from what Janz (1997:76) calls the 'lived African experience'.

Like Gyekye, Masolo (1997:289) recognizes that the growth of a developmental/ reconstructible position depends ultimately on holding in tension a relationship between philosophical argument and theses about the social world - a tension perennially present between 'specific historically conditioned social structures and the "abstract" nature of disciplines [like philosophy]'. The historically conditioned social structures he has in mind are traditional African moral/political practices, as these have been conditioned by input from Marxists and Western rights theorists. Two phenomena have struck Gyekye (1997:35ff,158ff) as particularly significant. First, the discourses on socialism in Africa were inspired by 'the humanist strand of African traditional social and moral thought' (1997:159) and that, not surprisingly, socialism was seen to be a 'moral attitude or stance' (1997:160). Nativist discourses on Africanness have accordingly focussed on the reconstruction of traditional forms of moral/political organization in attempts to reveal the perceived link between tradition and Marxism. Second, and seemingly paradoxically, the humanist tradition makes provision for 'arguments about rights that ... form part of the intellectual activity of a self-assertive, autonomous individual ... which cannot be set at nought by the "communal structure"' (1997:62-63). Traditionally individual rights have been recognised alongside collective rights, the former in particular inviting comparison with the insights of influential theorists like John Rawls.

3.2 Kwasi Wiredu: reconstructing rationality from 'the (cultural) particular'

Wiredu (1996:35) too finds a point of departure in the 'middle ground' of categories which have functioned as 'disabling universals' (Masolo 1997:291) in the African context. Besides dichotomies already mentioned (universal/particular, internal/external and interior/exterior), Wiredu focusses particularly on the 'naturalism/non-naturalism' antithesis (Wiredu 1996:35) because he needs to set it aside in order to get his project of founding 'universal' norms in human biology off the ground. (I place the

word 'universal' in inverted commas because Wiredu recognizes three different kinds of 'universal' category).

It is questionable whether a coherent demarcation can be made between one realm of processes and existences to be called nature, and another to be called anything else. Naturalism is generally supposed to be firmly anchored to the first side of this divide; and so it is. But insofar as it seems to concede so much as the logical possibility of such an ontological duality, it is problematic.

This last remark is inspired by my understanding and intellectual identification with my African traditional background of thought in which there is no bifurcation between nature and supernature and in which, consequently, the question of the biological foundation of norms does not precipitate any metaphysical puzzles (Wiredu 1996:35).

The natural/supernatural dichotomy is one case of 'the hasty universalization of certain Western categories of thought' (Wiredu 1996:49) which has played a 'disabling' (Masolo 1997:291) role in the foundation of misapprehensions about the African mind. According to Wiredu (1996:49) the African world is conceived of as 'ontologically homogeneous' (a conception embodied in the Akan language in the verb phrase *wo ho* (to exist), which means 'to be at some place'. There is no equivalent, in Akan, of the English existential 'to be' or 'is', and no way, in Akan, of 'speaking of the existence of something which is not in space' (Wiredu 1996:49). This 'locative connotation' or 'spatial specification' is 'irreducible' (Wiredu 1996:50). Wiredu (1996:55) explains as follows:

Nothingness in the Akan language is relative to location. The idea is expressed as the absence of anything at a given location, *se whee nniho*, literally, the circumstance of there not being something there. Note here the reappearance of the locative conception of existence. If you subtract the locative connotation from this construal of nothingness, you have exactly nothing left, that is, nothing of the conception remains in your understanding.

3.2.1 *Twin foundations of rationality: biology and culture*

A human 'commonality', which Wiredu identifies as 'norms of thought' (Wiredu 1996:34) founded in the biology of human species, and embodied in 'basic rationality' (Wiredu 1996:34) (the principles of non-contradiction and induction) and 'morality' (Wiredu 1996:41) (the principle of sympathetic impartiality) can be defended in a 'naturalistic' (Wiredu 1996:36) vein, without being held 'answerable to the metaphysics of naturalism' (Wiredu 1996:36) as this metaphysics has been defended in Western thought. Wiredu's arguments centre on the evolutionary (survivalist) necessity of the mentioned principles. Regarding the principle of non-contradiction it is evident that 'we will not survive ..., [any] thoroughgoing abnegation of the norm' (Wiredu 1996:38), which argues that a 'minimum of actual compliance as a naturally selected factor in our equipment for survival as species, [is] a selection too crucially evolutionally to have been left to the tender consistencies of the individual psyche' (Wiredu 1996:38). The possibility of inductive reasoning ('factual reasoning in general') is 'an evolutionally begotten condition of the mind', for which 'custom [in Hume's sense of 'that ingrained tendency of the mind'], provides a biological basis' (Wiredu 1996:40). A 'necessary connection' of the norm of sympathetic impartiality 'with the survival of the group and, beyond large, of the species' similarly invests it 'with the status of an evolutionary force' (Wiredu 1996:41).

The considerations advanced here are, according to Wiredu (1996:203), expressed in terms independent of the peculiarities of the Akan language. His point is not that a middle road is available because this is made possible by the conceptual structures of his vernacular; rather, the point is that

if a philosophical suggestion emanating from considerations relating to a natural language has any cross-cultural validity, it ought to be demonstrable or supportable with arguments not depending on the peculiarities of the original language (Wiredu 1996:207).

Our 'biologico-cultural identity as *homines sapientes*' (Wiredu 1996:22) makes possible transacculturated understanding of the norms at issue. Their biological foundation ensures their status as actual universals: they are common to all cultures in dent of 'a basic similarity of conceptualization among humans' (Wiredu 1996:20) at some levels, which also guarantees that '*at bottom*' all languages are 'inter-learnable and inter-translatable' (Wiredu 1996:26).

Whereas biological sameness accounts for the possibility of universality in standards of thought, the cultural element is the explanation of 'various degrees of relativity and subjectivity' (Wiredu 1996:22) - though cultural universals, like the moral norm of sympathetic impartiality, are also unifying factors (Wiredu 1996:28-33). For Wiredu (1996:28) culture is 'a patterned accumulation of contingencies of social consciousness and action in the context of a specific type of physical environment'. Among these 'contingencies' are 'differences in the structure and content of particular concepts' (Wiredu 1996:24), the consequence of the grammatical patterns and lexical formations of different languages. These contingent differences are 'tongue-dependent' (Wiredu 1996:101). (A tongue-dependent conceptual structure is, of course, necessarily language-dependent, but the reverse is not necessarily the case. Some conceptual structures are universal features of all languages). Wiredu (1996:101) offers the following example from logic.

1. 'A is equivalent to B' means by definition 'A if and only if B'.
2. 'A is equivalent to B' means by definition '(if A then B) and (if B then A)'.

Both (1) and (2) generate obvious logical truths in English, but only 2 does in Akan; (1) is not expressible in Akan, because Akan lacks 'a counterpart of the phrase "if and only if"' (Wiredu 1996:101) though it has the concept of a conditional. The truth that this logical truth 'if and only if' exists in English but not in Akan demonstrates that 'some logical truths are tongue-dependent and, therefore, not universal without qualification' (Wiredu 1996:102).

Wiredu (1993:451) argues persuasively that though there are 'failures of understanding across conceptual frameworks' - failures he attributes to a dependency relation between 'intelligibility and truth-value' on the one hand, and 'points-of-view and conceptual frameworks' on the other. However, since conceptual frameworks are linguistically and culturally embedded (Wiredu 1993:466), the dependency in question is one which 'incline[s]'; it does 'not necessitate' (Wiredu 1993:465), which is to say communication across conceptual frameworks is possible. The fact that all languages are inter-translatable, *though not without remainder*, means that 'no recognizable ways of conceptualization can be so disparate as to exclude the possibility of mutual appraisal' (Wiredu 1993:463). The qualification is significant. 'Details of the manner in which people conceptualize aspects of their experience are apt to reflect individual and group habits that need not, in all cases, be duplicated among all the branches of humankind. But even this is not a block to the possibility of "inter-framework dialogue"' (Wiredu 1993:463).

A comparison between some Western and African 'modes of conceptualizations' (Wiredu 1993:463) demonstrates this possibility, though these modes are in important ways very disparate. Consider, argues Wiredu (1993:468), that in English there is a tendency to 'metaphysical misinterpretation of grammar' (Wiredu 1993:472). Words like 'quality', 'prosperity', 'attribute', used as 'grammatical substantives' (Wiredu 1993:468) are thought to be 'objectually referential' (Wiredu 1993:468), so much so that they are thought of referring to individuals or entities of some kind, with the result that 'qualities come to be conceived as abstract entities' (Wiredu 1993:468) and that it becomes 'perfectly meaningful in English to objectify the semantic distinctions between substance and attribute' (Wiredu 1993:468). In Akan, however, 'conceptual incongruities' arise from this tendency to objectify the distinction between things and their qualities: 'meaningfulness is drastically compromised if one starts trying to pretend in Akan that a quality is some kind of entity' (Wiredu 1993:468). Moreover, the 'availability of meaning' is not enhanced by suggesting 'that a thing might exist and not be of any nature, which is what substance without qualities would amount to in Akan' (Wiredu 1993:468). Furthermore, there is no coherence in the idea 'that things and their ways

of being might be different types of entities which then need always swim or sink together' (Wiredu 1993:468). How could Hume's 'bundles of qualities' - 'a thing's various ways of being become the thing itself?' (Wiredu 1993:468). At bottom the problem is that in the 'Akan scheme of conceptualization it is simply a tautology to say that there cannot be a quality without a substance ... there cannot be the way a thing is without the thing' (Wiredu 1993:469). Yet the very possibility of this inter-frame dialogue is evidence that conceptual relativism cannot be radical. 'The very idea of disparate conceptual frameworks implies the possibility of inter-framework dialogue' (Wiredu 1993:463).

Other examples of qualified or 'tongue-dependent' universals abound (Wiredu 1996:21-33,45-60,81-104,105-112). The point Wiredu wishes to make with the idea of a qualified universal is well worth emphasizing; this is that not only do 'some values vary across cultures', but also that '[s]ome conceptions regarding factual matters ... may differ from culture to culture' (Wiredu 1996:20).¹⁰ The possibility of resolving such disparate conceptions is given by the biological identity of all humans, and by the fact that 'the foundation of all communication is biological' (Wiredu 1996:20). Yet, and this is the crucial point, though biological affinity makes possible transcultural 'comparison of experiences and the interpersonal adjustment of behaviour that constitute social existence' (Wiredu 1996:19), 'cultural factors predominate in the development of the powers of communication in an individual' (Wiredu 1996:20). This predominance accounts for the methodological 'relevance of anthropology and sociology' (Wiredu 1996:20) in philosophical accounts of personhood and the 'making of mind' (Wiredu 1996:19). Briefly, human life is a learning process which takes place in the context of a society 'starting with the narrow confines of mother or nurse and widening to larger and larger dimensions of community as time passes ... This learning process ... is, in fact, the making of mind' (Wiredu 1996:19). On this view the development of mind 'is the development of communication' (Wiredu 1996:19).

¹⁰ 'The problem of the relationship between truth and fact ... is another example of a tongue-dependent issue' (Wiredu 1996:103. See further Wiredu 1996:105-112).

The development of mind is the development of communication. We do not first develop a mind which then has to learn how to communicate. The objectivity of concepts [grounded in 'the basic biological similarity of human beings'] is guaranteed by their social provenance. This remark is not meant atomistically. Language is a system, and a concept is necessarily an element of language. Given the social establishment of a certain minimum of linguistic abilities, individual conceptual inventiveness is possible and its results are interpersonally intelligible because of the rule-governed character of language.

Communication itself, however, is a 'transference of thought-content' (Wiredu 1996:19). If a certain (Akan) view of mind (Wiredu 1980,1996) is correct, a thought-content 'is an aspect of a brain state' (Wiredu 1996:10). So transference is possible on the following view:

It is an empirical fact that patterns of brain processes can be set off by socially directed stimuli. In these terms, language is basically the systematic relating of external stimuli to patterns of brain processes. The transference of a thought content, from one person to another, then, is the inducement by the one in the other of some brain states through appropriate stimuli' (Wiredu 1996:19-20).

Transference is possible transculturally, in dint of the intertranslatability of all languages. This possibility accounts for transacculturated or 'potential universals' (Wiredu 1996:33), which are qualified universals in the process of becoming actual ones.

Wiredu thinks we arrive at the universal through the pursuit of the particular, a strategy he calls 'strategic particularism' (Wiredu 1996:208). As a strategy of doing philosophy it is in part a reaction to colonialism - 'the distortion of our conceptual frameworks through their articulation in the medium of foreign categories of thought' (Wiredu 1996:208) - and in

part a way of examining the worth, 'objective validity'¹¹ (Wiredu 1996:51-52), of Akan philosophical notions. For instance, the custom of pouring libation to the ancestors may be rationally regrounded if reference to the ancestors (and others of 'like quasi-material basis' - (Wiredu 1996:59) is interpreted as 'commemoration' rather than 'invocation'. The possibility of reinterpretation (consistent with Akan linguistic and conceptual structures) means that rationality is recoverable. (Wiredu 1996:59).¹² Recoverability is desirable because the belief in quasi-material personages is often critiqued as irrational. But consider that the critique falls short in the following way: the error made in assessing rationality reduces to 'applying a set of techniques of knowledge or of reasoning developed in the context of a particular system of rationality or life-style to the solution of problems inherent in another, different system of rationality or life-style' (Masolo 1995:206). For Wiredu these contexts are not 'irreconcilable' (Masolo 1995:209). Such beliefs had their appropriate contexts in the era of ethnophilosophy, and ethnophilosophy 'was a philosophy in its own right and context' (Masolo 1995:206). Reason's 'historical and empirical method and vocation' (Masolo 1995:210) does not change that fact. Indeed, in this vocation reason merely substitutes 'a new set of true propositions ... [for] the old' (Masolo 1995:211). Arguments which run on mere formal definitions of rationality or truth are by themselves not sufficient. We have, in addition, to 'give account of the [historical] circumstances under which ... definition itself obtains' (Masolo 1995:207), by asking 'what are ... [the] canons? What ... [are] the fundamental bas[e]s of those canons and what role do they play in the interactions and transactions of human beings with their environment and with their own kind?' (Wiredu 1980:212).

¹¹ 'Truth, as I believe I have stressed more than once, cannot be said to *depend* on a point of view - that gives the impression of relativism; a truth *is* a point of view' (Wiredu 1980:203).

'For Dewey the relation between truth and rational warranted assertability is one of analytic identity. For me it is a synthetic relation, since not all points of view are rational' (Wiredu 1980:211).

'I maintain that, as a psycho-epistemological fact, a basic sensitivity to the demands of rational inquiry is part of the mental make-up of any creature that can be called a human being. This as I have pointed out already, is why there are inter-personal criteria of rational belief. The existence of inter-personal criteria is the test of objectivity' (Wiredu 1980:217).

¹² Masolo (1995:204) asserts that although Wiredu 'recognizes significant differences between the forms of knowledge prevalent in the traditional society and the modern scientific forms of knowledge, Wiredu does not consider the two historical cultural contexts as entirely irreconcilable.'

3.2.2 *Rational resolvability*

Which of post-colonial African philosophy has been devoted to argument stating the contexts in which the canons of rationality are shown to be appropriate to their histories and times? If Wiredu's way is the right way to approach the matter, 'African traditional thought should ... only be compared with Western folk thought African folk thought may be compared with Western philosophy only in the same spirit in which Western folk thought may be compared also with Western philosophy, that is, only in order to find out the marks which distinguish folk thought in general from individualizing philosophizing. Then, if, there be any who are anxious to compare African philosophy with Western philosophy, they will have to look at the philosophy that Africans are producing today' (Wiredu 1998:197). The attractive theme in Wiredu is his rejection of the idea that rationality is something which is wholly independent of any social practice. Two things should be noted. To propound an immanentist conception of reason, by which traditions of reason are thought to lie inside the cultures that spawn them, is to propound only a benign form of relativism, in as much as reason's genesis lies in the particular norms of 'tongue-dependent' traditions. Though rationality or rationalities are immanent in human practice they can, for pragmatic or expedient reasons, transcend that practice and become actual universal norms. As in Gyekye this, however, is entirely a contingent matter. Consequently whether a consideration is a reason for someone to believe something or act in some way cannot be judged only from within the practice itself, but also from a standpoint independent of the practice of which the relevant consideration is a part.

The idea that rationality has twin foundations commits Wiredu to the view that beyond the laws of logic there is no guarantee that norms of justification will be shared by all to whom we attribute *thought*. Since what we share beyond the laws of logic, is shared as a matter of contingency, it is in principle possible - outside the intersection of shared norms - for there to be a plurality of equally coherent but mutually exclusive sets of beliefs for interpreting and reconstructing the social and natural worlds. This territory outside the class of shared norms raises the possibility of incommensurability of the kind considered above. Wiredu's version of the

language thesis (Wiredu 1996:13-20,81-104) is addressed to this possibility. But the recognition of a shared realm implicitly installs a coherent conception of rational resolvability, and this is that if an argument is a good one it must be persuasive for any person who accepts its premisses. Its conclusion must, therefore, potentially be the object of rational consensus.

Shared norms of justification and assessment may, however, be intractable in practice. Intractability is due to disagreement on why one reason to believe something or act in some way in one tradition is persuasive in that tradition but not another, persuasiveness being measured in terms of ranked importance or weight of the considerations that make up the reason. The basic problem here is that it seems impossible to give a principled account of the relative importance of weight and ranking which holds as reasonable by the standards of any tradition - a phenomenon which leaves plenty of room for reasonable disagreement. Yet there is a way of handling even intractability so that it does not become the source of incommensurability. This is where the developmental view of rationality again plays a role in Wiredu's thought. If a particular tradition at one time is faced with an epistemological crisis in which it fails by its standards to deal with an incoherence, it may be overridden and superceded by another tradition at another time which does by its standards provide a cogent, coherent account of the problem. If Wiredu is right this is something ethnophilosophy faced during the colonial era and did not satisfactorily weather. That is why many belief systems in Africa must be reinterpreted if they are to be rationally regrounded.

Hountondji (1983b:134), agreeing with Wiredu (1996:193-199), defines the internal rationality of particular cultures as 'a set of laws governing the functioning of the social machinery' which he regards as 'a coherent, deliberate, self-conscious, though partly unspoken system of propositions'. Masolo (1983:47), citing Sodipo, argues that something like Hountondji's conception, which corresponds roughly to the 'Bantu Wisdom in Tempels' (Masolo 1983:47), must be invoked to explain how 'we come to *know* the real, in the sense of understanding it and knowing it for what it is - beyond the medium of sense experience' (Masolo 1983:47). How 'we come to *know*'

in the appropriate sense, is a matter linked to history. In that regard Masolo (1983:47) opines 'that every historical event is unique in a way that the experiments or replications of natural science are not', a view he shares with Outlaw (1983:26): 'Standards are relative to the cultural matrix (life-world, language-game), thus to the historicity, of those who generate and employ them'. Like Masolo and Wiredu, Outlaw's emphasis on particularity is interlinked to undermine 'a false universality ... hidden under the cloak of a dogmatic, imperialistic "rationality" shaped by a "single consistency" theory of truth' (Outlaw 1983:26); it is not intended to make a case for relativism other than the benign form of it already noted in the developmental conception of rationality.

Hountondji (1983b:136), like Wiredu, believes that the defence of internal rationality arose historically as a response to the colonial denial of the rationality of African modes of thought, but there are limits to the 'legitimacy' (Hountondji 1983b:138) of this reaction to devaluation. The challenge posed by Africa's 'internal pluralism' (Hountondji 1983b:137) is not so much to show that anthropology tried to 'level our so-called traditional cultures, by failing to grasp ... [our] internal "dialectics"', but to defend the internal rationality of Africa's customs *without* "fixing" them artificially ... to a given stage of their development, and betraying their internal dynamism, their endogenous capability to evolve and change' (Hountondji 1983b:183). Wiredu advises researching 'the circumstances in which ... [reasons for the continuation of certain customs] were first formulated, i.e. the origins and history of the custom at stake' (Hountondji 1983b:139), in an effort to understand 'the fundamental bas[e]s of ... [the] canons [of their internal rationality]' (Wiredu 1980:212). Only then is it possible to escape Africa's 'inclusion' in Western philosophy 'as the negative "other" of reason' (Eze 1998:218).

Recourse to particularism of the kind advocated here produces philosophies 'with the most time-honoured of motivations' (Wiredu 1996:146) summed up in Serequeberhan's words - 'that of the critical and explorative engagement of one's own cultural and historic specificity' (Wiredu 1996:196 quoting Serequeberhan) an echo of Janz's notion that post-colonial African philosophy implicates itself 'in its own tradition' (Janz

1997:234). But these philosophies based upon contemporary African experience (as distinct from African traditional world-views) is philosophy 'that is being produced by contemporary African philosophers. It is still in the making' (Wiredu 1980:36). The problem of 'self-definition' (Wiredu 1996:147) sits high on the list of Africa's 'critical and explorative' priorities, involving 'some settling of accounts with our colonial history' (Wiredu 1996:148) and grappling with 'Africa-oriented issues' (Wiredu 1996:148-149), in particular the 'politico-existential crises interior to post-colonial Africa' (Wiredu 1996:148). In the sense in which the former shows that 'there is something political about our concerns' (Wiredu 1996:148) post-colonial African philosophy is 'ultimately political, for the understanding of reality that we seek is for the betterment of human existence' (Wiredu 1996:148). In the global milieu 'betterment' is best understood as a function of honourable give and take: there should be a programme for African philosophers *as a class*' (Wiredu 1996:149) 'to domesticate any modern resources of philosophical insight not already exploited in our culture' (Wiredu 1996:149). No African philosopher should be debarred from supposing 'that the Yomba or Akan conception of a person captures some truths about human personality and that this teaches us something about the ontological make-up not only of Yomba or Akan persons but also of Eskimos, Americans, Chinese, or whoever' (Wiredu 1996:149). Philosophy, in the debate between Africa and the West, should be understood, in Janz's (1997:230) words, as 'irreducibly dialogical', for 'the same work can, for reasons of history, come to belong to two traditions [Western and African] at once' (Wiredu 1996:149).

3.3 Paulin Hountondji: rationality, history and Marx

For Hountondji (1983a), as for Wiredu (1989,1996), African philosophy is 'a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves' (Hountondji 1983a:33). This view of philosophy as 'a kind of literature produced by Africans and dealing with philosophical problems' (Wiredu 1989:5) is hostile to African traditional communal thought in its vocation as a tradition of philosophical thought in Africa. Ethnophilosophy, says Hountondji (1983a:45) - quoting Eboussi-Boulaga and echoing

Serequeberhan's (1994) notion of post-colonial African philosophy's dilemma of the 'double-bind' - is a case of 'doubly interpreted misinterpretation', in which the victim makes itself the executioner's secret accomplice, in order to commune with him in an artificial world of falsehood.' It is philosophy constructed 'for a European public' (Hountondji 1983a:45) in which Africans are 'as usual, excluded from the discussion' (Hountondji 1983a:34), and so silent, unable to protest the fixing of the discourse 'on the level of fantasy, remote from the burning reality of colonial exploitation' (Hountondji 1983a:37). In this vein Hountondji (1983a:45) observes scathingly that in Senghor 'the West expressed itself through Africans, as it knows so well to do'. Senghor

... made himself the spokesman of ALL-Africa facing ALL-Europe at the imaginary rendezvous of give and take - from which we observe that 'Africanist' particularism goes hand in glove, *objectively*, with an abstract universalism, since the African intellectual who adopts it thereby expounds it, over the heads of his own people, in a mythical dialogue with his European colleagues, for the constitution of a civilization of the universal.

Senghor, and others of his persuasion, have enacted Bernasconi's dilemma of the 'double-bind'. On the one hand they have presented 'ethnographic discourse' as philosophical (Hountondji 1983a:52), thus following Western ethnocentrists on a road that leads away from philosophy. On the other hand, believing that African philosophy lies in the past and not 'before us' (Hountondji 1983a:53 echoing Wiredu 1980;1989;1996), they have done what Europe expects of them - 'that we should offer her our civilizations as showpieces' (Hountondji 1983a:52), to be appropriately labelled 'a collective world-view, an implicit, spontaneous, perhaps even unconscious system of beliefs to which all Africans ... adhere' (Hountondji 1983a:60) - a view they label 'vulgar usage' (Hountondji 1983a:60) of the concept of philosophy.

A recovery of the past, which means a rational reconstruction of traditional belief in a modern idiom, must go to the root of the problem and break at least one leg of the 'double-bind'. Hountondji (pace Wiredu (1996) and

Gyekye (1997)) proposes to dissolve dissimilarity by excising Western metaphysical assumptions of monolithicity and unanimity from ethnophilosophy's cultural and social milieu. He argues, along a Marxian line of the critique of ideology (an echo of Gyekye 1997), that Western constructs have concealed 'the historical relativity [of ethnophilosophical texts] as texts produced at a given time by an individual or a group of individuals motivated by specific interests which might have placed him or them in conflict with other individuals or groups of individuals in the same community' (Hountondji 1983:179). So ethnophilosophy, as presented by the West, 'misses the true nature of practical ideology; it cannot see it as it really is, in its essence, as a set of schemes each with its own history and its own logic It always assumes that ... practical ideology must contain a single, coherent system with a clear theoretical logic' and so fails to see that the 'practical ideology (in the singular) of a group is never anything more than its *dominant* practical ideology' (Hountondji 1983a:178). Ethnophilosophy, stripped of the European constructs, is therefore recoverable as a body of 'philosophical literatures' (Hountondji 1983a:64), 'pre-philosophy' (Hountondji 1983a:63) belonging to the history of African literature in general.

3.3.1 *Marx and the tradition of political philosophy*

If ethnophilosophy is recoverable only as pre-philosophy, then where or when does the tradition of contemporary African philosophy begin? Hountondji's (1983a:71) views on what constitutes the contemporary tradition supplies an answer. This tradition begins with the advent of Marxist social thought in its liberating vocation as expressed in the thought of Kwame Nkrumah.

As Hountondji reconstructs the central tenets of Nkrumah's thought - 'philosophy is history' (Hountondji 1983a:75), in particular, a history of ongoing, open-ended discourses, vulnerable to the pull of revolution and discontinuity, its path is dialectical rather than linear. Against this backdrop ethnophilosophy is but a 'moment of our history', 'the product of the ideological structure of our time' (Hountondji 1983a:76). Indeed, philosophy is 'the to and fro of free discussion' (Hountondji 1983a:72),

'historical in its very substance' (Hountondji 1983a:83) - an echo of Janz's idea of 'irreducibly dialogical'.

It [philosophy] has the intrinsic historicity of a pluralistic discourse, in which different interlocutors question and answer one another within a generation or from one generation to another.

The explanation of why history is 'structurally disjointed' (Hountondji 1983a:91) - 'an *envelopment* of old thoughts by the new' (Hountondji 1983a:90 quoting Bachelard) - lies 'outside discourse' (Hountondji 1983a:91) in the real-world conditions Marx and Engels outline in *The German Ideology*. From Marx and Engels Hountondji (1983a:93) accepts the notion that 'history ... does not draw from itself the law of its own development...[for this] is determined in the last analysis by the history of the production of material goods and that of the social relations of production'. The insight that the ebb and flow of an 'economic base' (Hountondji 1983a:94) determines the discontinuous path of history - 'the transition from one historical moment to another' (Hountondji 1983a:96) - and that attention to this fact in Africa was the key to liberation, Hountondji ascribes to Nkrumah.

Revolution is ... an indispensable avenue to socialism, where the antecedent socio-political structure is animated by principles which are a negation of those of socialism, as in a capitalist structure (and therefore also in a colonialist structure, for a colonialist structure is essentially ancillary to capitalism).

It transpires that the

Nature and cause of the conflict between the ruling class and the exploited class is influenced by the development of productive forces, that is, changes in technology; the economic relations which these forces condition; and the ideologies that reflect the properties and psychology of the people living in that society (Hountondji 1983a:144 quoting Nkrumah).

The class struggle in Africa is the reality which Western 'culturalism' (Hountondji 1983a:160) has concealed. Culturalism 'is an ideological system because it produces an indirect political effect' (Hountondji 1983a:162) - it emphasizes the cultural aspect of foreign domination at the expense of the economic and political aspects, thereby camouflaging the problem of the class struggle. This camouflaging effect is achieved in two ways. The national cultures are schematized and flattened by being denied their 'internal pluralism and historical depth' (Hountondji 1983a:162). This false construct is then contrasted with the colonizer's culture and this 'imaginary opposition' (Hountondji 1983a:162) given precedence over real political and economic conflicts. Alternatively, the false cultural construct is used to divert the attention of the exploited classes from their exploited condition under the fallacious pretext of their common participation in the creation of 'the national culture' (Hountondji 1983a:162), this being yet another false construct disguising the neo-colonialism of the ruling class (Hountondji 1983a:160). Culturalism is 'the focus of ... complicity' (Hountondji 1983a:163) between Western ethnologists and Third World Nationalists (the black governing elite) and 'the secret of our defeat by the West (Hountondji 1983a:172). To bring about a transition and thereby reverse the defeat, Hountondji, following Nkrumah's lead and Althusser's advice, recommends that Africa 'must promote positively a Marxist theoretical tradition' (Hountondji 1983a:183) though this means 'putting to work [aspects of] the European concept of philosophy' (Hountondji 1983a:172). The rationale, as Hountondji sees it, is that this concept of philosophy 'goes hand in hand with ... science'.¹³ (Hountondji 1983a:172).

Taking his cue from the Marxist Althusser, who advocated that 'the great philosophical revolutions are always the sequel of great scientific revolutions' (Hountondji 1983a:97 citing Althusser), Hountondji (1983a:98) sees the genesis of a tradition of philosophy in Africa in the growth of African science.

¹³ See Gyekye (1997:158-162) for a substantially different account of the socialist interludes in Africa.

African philosophy cannot be separated from African science and we shall never have, in Africa, a philosophy in the strict sense, a philosophy articulated as an endless search, until we have produced, in Africa, a history of science, a history of the sciences.

This revolution begins with Nkrumah's recognition of the existence of the class struggle in Africa. Post-colonial philosophy in Africa, to be philosophy, must - in Janz's phrase - implicate itself in *this interpretation* of its tradition, for only then can African philosophy go through '*its first decisive mutation*, the outcome of which depends on us alone, on the courage and lucidity we show in bringing it to its conclusion' (Hountondji 1983a:71).

Does this mean that the word 'philosophy', when qualified by the word 'African', changes its habitual meaning? Hountondji's (1983a:56) own view is that 'the universality of the word 'philosophy' throughout its possible geographic locations' must be preserved. Yet Hountondji's own attempt to circumscribe the qualifier 'African' brings on a 'deconstructive encounter' (Outlaw 1990:241) with the white world. Hountondji's understanding of reason as 'dialectical', which involves an attempt to deconstruct ethnophilosophical concepts by viewing them in 'the fabric of historicity out of which they have been shaped' (Outlaw 1990:225), brings on the encounter aimed at derailing African attempts 'to construct a self-image in the mirror of a ... Greco-European philosophical anthropology' (Outlaw 1990:225). Outlaw (1990:225) contends that contemporary philosophy in Africa have been 'deconstructive' - in the way Hountondji deconstructs ethnophilosophy - 'as a function of the historical exigencies conditioning their emergence'. There is, then, a sense in which the addition of the adjective 'African' to the word 'philosophy' changes the meaning of the substantive.¹⁴ The notion of philosophy is broadened, to include not only the 'second order (systematic, critical) constructions and analyses of specialists', but also the 'first order meaningful constructions of a society' (Hountondji 1983a:25). According to Outlaw (1983:26-27), this view should commit Hountondji to the further

¹⁴ Wiredu (1996:151) dubbs Hountondji's view as 'thinly Africanized'.

view that 'truth and knowledge are double rather than single contingents. They depend both on the world and on human beings as knowing subjects and makers of propositions'. So true propositions about the world 'are those which are present in or correspond to external reality as that reality is organized by the categories of the cultural context to which those propositions belong'. For Outlaw this means that the difference between true propositions drawn from different cultural contexts is just 'the result of differing sets of rules for thinking'. But endorsing this view is a step Hountondji refuses to take.

3.3.2 *Marx and the tradition of practical reason*

It has been noted above that from Marx and Engels Hountondji (1983a:93) accepts the notion that 'history...does not draw from itself the law of its own development...[for this] is determined in the last analysis by the history of the production of material goods and that of the social relations of production. For each mode of production there corresponds a distinctive standard of justice, so a standard of justice can only be meaningfully applied to the mode of production from which it arises. Marx's concept of justice is accordingly not only historical but also pluralistic: in general the features of distribution in any society are determined by a society's basic productive processes. Communism's superiority over capitalism will be found in its distinctive productive processes, and the superiority in production will be so great that it will prevent the circumstances of distributive justice from arising and with it the need for principles of distributive justice' (Buchanan 1982:53-60). Two significant assumptions are made. Individuals will be cooperative, communal beings for whom work itself would be intrinsically satisfying, and class conflict will be ended by the fact that history will abolish class distinctions. The realization of the classless utopia would require a revolutionary motivation which will arise from the class struggle itself, the struggle i.e. in which propertied nonworkers are politically overwhelmed by a majority of propertyless workers. Initially the proletarian motivation is class interest but this will give way to community interest as a state of affairs is achieved by which all public goods are available to anyone in the community, including those future members who have not shared in the cost of bringing it about

(Buchanan 1982:87). According to Buchanan (1982:98-99) Marx's account of the revolutionary motivation assumes that rationality is a historically conditioned social product; the concept of rationality against which Marx is reacting - the idea of rationality as individual or group utility-maximization - is nothing but the *bourgeois* concept of rationality.

For Outlaw it is not clear why the recovery of reason in Africa should begin from within a particular (European) cultural agenda - *viz* neo-Marxism - with the onset of resistance to colonialism. Perhaps the attractions of Marxism as a starting point lies in Hountondji's interpretation of Althusser's directive as the 'scientization of philosophy' (Outlaw 1990:226). Hountondji, seemingly, places his hopes in political science, rather than anthropology or sociology, as foundation science for philosophy. Masolo (1995:203) observes that for Hountondji

The task of philosophy lies in Marx's formulation of the nature of political philosophy, which is to say, the correlative political realization of philosophy and the philosophical realization of politics. In this sense, a vision of the good society is an indispensable aspect of the movement of those who must change the destiny of African peoples.

Hountondji, however, is clear on this point. In the history of accounts of the possibility of pure reason practical reason turns out to be something more than just internal rationalities. 'Every philosophical doctrine is a reply to foregoing doctrines in the double mode of confirmation and refutation...so that every philosophy looks forward and backward, to the inexhaustible history of the discipline' (Hountondji 1996:89). To understand how philosophical revolutions 'are functions of scientific revolutions' (Hountondji 1996:98) we must understand that, 'while not a mechanical reflection of the economic structure, [philosophical discourse]...is strictly modelled on the model of scientific discourse...and in this way hinges upon the history of material practices' (Hountondji 1996:98). But we must also understand that although philosophy 'is itself determined in the last instance by a political project, it cannot be reduced to a mere commentary on it' (Hountondji 1996:175). For it is the 'total politicization of philosophical

discourse that constitutes the most serious obstacle to any theory of the political' (Hountondji 1996:175).

3.4 Anthony Appiah: rationality, culture and the liberal ideal of Pan-Africanism

Serequeberhan maintains that the so-called school of professional philosophers have 'succumbed to a universalism which ... reinforce Africa's position as Europe's other. In ignoring the particular African historical life-world, those attempting to appropriate Marxism [Hountondji] as well as those attempting to argue for an African essentialism [Mbiti, Tempels] end up philosophizing on non-African terms.' (Janz 1997:226 citing Serequeberhan 1994:9). The problem with 'particularized' philosophy, opines Janz (echoing Serequeberhan), is that it can 'look very much like universalist philosophy, only beginning from a non-European base' (Janz 1997:222). And the problem with 'universalist' philosophy is that it fails 'to represent all human experience' because it generalizes 'from one point' (Janz 1997:222) i.e. it falsely parades European particularisms as universalisms.

3.4.1 *The critique of naturalized universals and the making of universality*

Appiah (1992:57) observes that Chinweizu and other African cultural nationalists define their task as one of wrestling 'the critical ethnocentrism of their Eurocentric opponents to the ground in the name of an Afrocentric particularism'. Their problem is not with 'universalism' as such - rather, it is with 'Eurocentric hegemony posing as universalism' (Appiah 1992:58). In opposing this they unwittingly fall victim to the problem of 'double-bind', for, in effect, they succeed in establishing little more than a 'reverse discourse' in which 'the terms of resistance are already given us, and our contestation is entrapped within the Western cultural conjuncture we affect to dispute' (Appiah 1992:59). Set this aside, and it becomes clear that Afrocentric particularism is 'itself covertly universalist' (Appiah 1992:60). Note, observes Appiah, that African nativists organise their particularities into a 'culture', which is an artifact of Western modernity (Appiah 1992:60). They challenge the Western bias of literary criticism, but not 'the way in

which its defining subject is constructed ...[as a Western artifact] (Appiah 1992:60), which they cannot do without giving up the whole idea of a 'topology of nativism' (Appiah 1992:60). In so far as these nationalists naturalize i.e. universalize - 'the value-laden categories of "literature" and "culture", the triumph of universalism has ... already taken place' (Appiah 1992:60).

Appiah's argument against naturalized universals recalls Wiredu's 'tongue-dependent' ones. The distinction between the true and the false universal should not be taken lightly - for the nationalist attack on 'universalism' 'leads to the occlusion of genuine local difference' (Appiah 1992:58). Witness, for example, how the English colonialists' own respect for tradition at home disposed them favourably to what they took to be respect for tradition in Africa, which respect they converted into something called 'customary law' thereby 'monumentalizing the flexible operations of precolonial systems of social control' (Appiah 1992:61) and constructing an African identity from their own cultural bias. This 'inverted' (Appiah 1992:61) traditionalism has, among nationalists, acquired the status of 'national mythology' (Appiah 1992:61) through which the 'colonial encounter' (Appiah 1992:61 citing Ranger 1983:212) was expressed.

A similar problem besets the nationalists's search for a *general* theory of literature. Euro-American conceptions of theory are riven by a 'determined universality' (Appiah 1992:63) which encompasses ideas of 'generality' and 'epistemological universality' (Appiah 1992:63), drawn from a strong sense of the term 'literary theory' which designates 'the general constitution of a coherent, unified theory' (Appiah 1992:63 citing Kambouchner). Now, to the extent that African writing fails to conform to this sense, says Appiah (1992:64), 'that is a problem for the theory, revealing it as yet another local principle masquerading as universal'. If we abandon this sense the nativist struggle for theory becomes a preference to understand literary theory as 'the totality of texts, theoretical in nature, devoted to literature' (Appiah 1992:63 citing Kambouchner), which constitutes a weak sense of theory and embraces a particularist stance: 'to read literature by means of a theory drawn from the text's own cultural or intellectual inheritance' (Appiah 1992:65). Reading literature in this way 'from the inside' (Appiah 1992:66),

laments Appiah, does little to waylay 'the triumph of universalism' (Appiah 1992:60), and the reason - which applies also to philosophy - is that 'the problematic from which the theoretical discourse about literature arises is not a universal one, not at least until it is *made* universal' (Appiah 1992:68, his emphasis), and this making is nothing other than a 'Eurocentric presumption' which insists on 'a correspondence within African culture to the institutionalized discourses of the West' (Appiah 1992:68).

The making of universality is not something African philosophers can escape. This is an imperative of historical circumstances; it is too late for Europe and Africa to escape each other, and thus Africa might 'seek to turn to ... [her] advantage the mutual interdependencies which history has thrust upon ... [Europe and Africa]' (Appiah 1992:72). The reality of this premiss is a force working towards the adoption of a 'comparative perspective' (Appiah 1992:96), not only within the post-colonial philosophical endeavours in Africa, which turns out to be forms of 'nativism', but also between Africa's multifarious ethnic and Europe's neo-colonial hegemonic endeavours. There is, of course, good reason, philosophically speaking, why a comparative approach is advisable, and this is that the future of philosophy in Africa does not have to be either Western or traditionally oriented. Africa 'can take elements of each and create new ... [systems] of its own The life of reason requires the integration of elements' (Appiah 1992:95). Africa's own precolonial tradition offers a 'useful beginning' (Appiah 1992:100) though in bringing 'a Western philosophical training' (Appiah 1992:98) to bear on this tradition care should be taken not simply to project Western ideas and methods 'into the indigenous conceptual framework' (Appiah 1992:98).

3.4.2 *Rationality in tradition and in the choice of modernity*

The assumption that Africa's pre-colonial tradition is worth recovering is boosted by the undoubted fact that 'our [contemporary] modes of thought remain ... much closer to traditional ideas than many are willing to acknowledge' (Appiah 1992:91). Taking his cue from Wright, who argues that the 'understanding of practical affairs' require 'that we clearly delineate their underlying philosophical motivation' (Appiah 1992:103 citing Wright

1979), Appiah observes that common conceptual traits, which originate in the traditional conceptual worlds of Africa, persist in contemporary African thought, and that this provides 'the basis for a common set of African philosophical problems' (Appiah 1992:103). The 'integration of elements' should therefore be approached with caution lest Africans adopt 'too little... [or] too much of the intellectual baggage of ... [their] former colonizers' (Appiah 1992:103).

The genesis of these common conceptual traits is traditional African thought handed down by the ethnophilosophers. The assumption that understanding their thought is helpful in present conceptual inquiries rests on the further assumption that they have been 'genuinely and deeply understood' (Appiah 1992:102) and thus that a line of thought can be reconstructed in which they figure as part of Africa's philosophical tradition. Now, it is generally agreed (Hountondji 1983a, Gyekye 1987, Wiredu 1986) that their mistake was one of essentialism: they thought of African philosophy as being '*about* African concepts' (Appiah 1992:100) and not of it as part of a universal discourse carried on by Africans - 'universal' in the sense that all cultures engage in it. But, essentialism aside, the crucial question about traditional belief, which brings the philosophical significance about it into relief, concerns rationality. To understand what underpins rationality in ritual acts is to understand 'what is necessary in the understanding of any acts: namely, to understand what beliefs and intentions underlie [i.e. 'inform'] them, so that we know what the actors think they are doing, what they are trying to do' (Appiah 1992:109,110).

There are, of course, important tests of rationality which are generated by the internal relationships between rationality and truth. Three premisses are here worth examining. First, rationality in belief may be said to consist in a disposition to change one's beliefs if evidence shows that they are false (Appiah 1992:116). Second, if this is right, inconsistency in belief is a sign of irrationality, for inconsistency is a guarantee that at least one belief is false (inconsistent beliefs cannot all be true). But it is true that within a communological set-up, among a set of language users, consistency is only a necessary condition of rationality, for intersubjective criteria can uphold habits which may be rational yet false when viewed from a perspective

outside the context. This brings us to the third premiss. Here it is expedient to state it in Appiah's own words. He (1992:117) opines that it

is just fundamentally correct that there is no requirement other than consistency that we can place on our beliefs in advance, in order to increase their likelihood of being true; and that a person who starts with a consistent set of beliefs can arrive, by way of reasonable principles of evidence, at the most fantastic untruths.

To this extent Appiah shares a certain pragmatism alongside coherence with Wiredu and Gyekye. The wisdom of 'epistemological modesty' (Appiah 1992:117), one of the great lessons of the history of natural science, argues the case: 'there are no apriori rules that will guarantee us true theories' (Appiah 1992:117), and this makes it reasonable to adhere to a "'traditional" world view' (Appiah 1992:118) - reasonable in the sense that theories underlying traditional world views and natural science are all 'explanatory systems of belief that share the problem of undetermination'¹⁵ (Appiah 1992:119).

Science and traditional belief are very different, and this stems from the 'totally different social organization of enquiry in traditional and modern cultures' (Appiah 1992:122). What is absent in traditional cultures is a 'developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets' (Appiah 1992:125), something very highly developed in the scientifically oriented cultures. In the latter the social organization of enquiry is geared to 'organized challenges to prevailing theory' (Appiah 1992:125), and in the former to the celebration of 'cognitive continuity'

¹⁵ When we say that theory is undetermined by observation, and that observation is 'theory-laden' we mean that the application of theory to particular cases relies 'on a whole set of other beliefs, not all of which can be checked at once' (Appiah 1992:119). The 'theory-ladenness' of theory refers to the phenomenon by which 'theory both contribute to forming our experience and give meaning to the language we use for reporting it' (Appiah 1992:119).

All cultures, however, have the conceptual resources for two fundamental sorts of explanation - 'all have some sort of notion of ... "efficient" cause: the causality of push and pull through which we can understand the everyday interactions of material objects and forces ... each has a notion of explanation that applies paradigmatically to human action ... the notion ... characterized as involving the "international stance" ... [which] relates actions to beliefs, desires, intentions, fears, and so on ...' (Appiah 1992:123).

(Appiah 1992:125). This, opines Appiah (1992:12), is the product of 'different kinds of social process'. The African cultures were 'largely non-literate' (Appiah 1992:130), and literacy is a necessary pre-requisite of the "'adversarial" methods of the sciences' (Appiah 1992:129), and the most significant mover towards 'universality in ... language' (Appiah 1992:131) i.e. towards the formulation of principles which hold not just for the particular, but generally.

The question whether African cultures should adopt these 'adversarial' styles of enquiry is not just technical. The crucial consideration, thinks Appiah (1992:135), might be put as a choice between different things. 'We cannot avoid the issue of whether it is possible to adopt adversarial, individualistic cognitive styles, and keep, as we might want to, accommodative, communitarian morals.' Should a segregation of moral-political and cognitive spheres be recommended? Appiah answers in the negative. Africa's postcolonial post-nativist novelists - in an endeavour to escape neo-colonialism - have not committed themselves to the idea of 'the nation' (Appiah 1992:152). Rather, they have chosen, instead of the nation, 'not an older traditionalism, but Africa - the continent and its people' (Appiah 1992:152). They identify with 'the nigger trash, who have no nationality' (Appiah 1992:152), and for this purpose 'one republic is as good - which is to say as bad - as any other [take your pick from the existing thirty]' (Appiah 1992:152). It is this postulation of oneself as *African* - 'and neither as of this or that allegedly precolonial ethnicity nor of the new nation-states' (Appiah 1992:152) that, strictly, presents a choice in favour of 'accommodative, communitarian morals' (Appiah 1992:135). Post-nativist politics reaches to 'a *transnational* rather than a *national* solidarity' (Appiah 1992:155). This is an African identity 'coming into being' (Appiah 1992:174) on its own steam, which does not require any 'space-clearing gesture' (Appiah 1992:156) from Europe to find its place, nor any 'manufacture of otherness' (Appiah 1992:156) to be recognized for what it is.

The choice for Africa's intellectuals is clear.

Pan-African solidarity can be appropriated by those of us whose position as intellectuals - as searchers after truth - make it impossible for us to live through the falsehoods of race and tribe and nation, whose understanding of history makes us sceptical that nationalism and racial solidarity can do the good that they can do without the attendant evils of racism - and other particularisms; without the warring of nations (Appiah 1992:175).

The task of philosophy is to bring this vision to fruition. And this means that any philosophy of culture fitting for Africa must abandon communal readings of culture in favour of conjunctural ones.

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