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Guide on the Analytic-Synthetic Distinction  
Editorial Policy  
Notes on Contributors  
Editorial Board

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ON WHAT EXISTS: BEYOND STRAWSON'S  
ONTOLOGY OF BASIC PARTICULARS

by

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Volume 20

# Section A

Strawson's *Individuals* (1959), argues that it is basic particulars that exist in our world. These basic particulars are made up of material bodies and persons. Uniquely, he rejects anything which does not fall under material bodies and persons. This position, much as it is considered traits of materialism and the nominalist view of individuals, does not seem to have as to how we can account for the remaining parts of our universe. In other words, his account does not seem to provide the moral and philosophical connection on "what exists".

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# 2002/2003

Many contemporary philosophers have argued that the theory of basic particulars fails the re-interpretation of the relevance theory of meaning which states that the meaning of a word is the reference given to it; accordingly, one can also give the same meaning to the word "basic particular" in the sense that it has no strong internal evidence to make it to matter. Singling out this theory further, it aptly supports recent developments in cybernetics (artificial intelligence), human organ transplant and cloning. However, what we

## **ON WHAT EXISTS: BEYOND STRAWSON'S ONTOLOGY OF BASIC PARTICULARS**

by

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### **Abstract**

P. F. Strawson, in his seminal book, *Individuals* (1959), argues that it is only basic particulars that exist in our world.

These basic particulars are made up of material bodies and persons. Invariably, he jettisons anything which does not fall under material bodies and persons. This position, much as it accords with some tenets of materialism and the nominalist view on universals, is still beset with some problems as to how we can account for the constituents of our universe. In other words, his account does not seem to provide the moral and psychological satisfaction on "what exists".

Many consequences can be drawn from Strawson's ontology of basic particulars. First, the re-inforcement of the reference theory of meaning, which states that the meaning of a word is the object to which it refers. Secondly, it is a thorough-going materialist theory on mind-body problem, in the sense that it holds mind and mental events as reducible to matter. Stretching this theory further, it aptly supports recent developments in cybernetics (artificial intelligence), human organ transplant and cloning. However, while we

may accept the numerous innovations of these thoughts anchored on materialism, we believe that basic moral issues are left out of such an ontology solely predicated on material bodies and persons. Thirdly, Strawson's theory also diminishes the importance of universal or general concepts. This is damaging to our commonsense conception of what objects and actions have in common, for instance, in moral and epistemological discourses.

Having shown some of these problems, we shall argue that Strawson's ontology of basic particulars leaves much of our commonsense ontology as it violates some scientific and metaphysical canons. Consequent upon the preceding arguments, Strawson's ontology of basic particulars is not rigorous enough as it fails to provide a rational explanation of our ontology. Our submission is, that a complete and more plausible ontology should not only include basic particulars, actions or events, but also, our mental or psychological states.

### **Introduction**

Man is constantly in search of knowing what he is and what the world around him is. However, there has been no adequate ontological theory to account for the constituents of the universe. So far, we can identify three theories which have been postulated. These are

materialism<sup>1</sup> and idealism<sup>2</sup> at the two extremes and the theory of ontological relativity.<sup>3</sup> All these theories have their various versions.

In contemporary times, the materialist ontology has been the dominant one, due mainly to the successes of the natural and applied sciences. Hence, reality is explained in physicalist terms. However, in spite of the successes of this dominant and contemporaneous ontology, it is still inadequate to account for reality, because it leaves certain things unaccounted for. For instance, it cannot give an adequate explanation to some non-physical phenomena such as magic, extra sensory perception (ESP), and some form of traditional healing processes, which constitute inherent part of human universe.

This paper takes a look at P. F. Strawson's ontology of basic particulars which is an example of a thorough-going materialist ontology. In this paper, an attempt is made to show the limitation of Strawson's ontology of basic particulars and then go beyond the problem by postulating a more adequate ontology which we call, "A coherentist approach to metaphysics."

A very important question that we can raise is the

justification of research into what exists. The following reasons can be adduced: First, the kind of conception of reality which a man holds determines his attitude to life. Subsequently, his attitude to life determines his attitude to other human beings, since he is a social being who lives in a community of men and women. For instance, if one is a thorough-going materialist like Karl Marx or P. F. Strawson, he is likely to believe some or all of the following: (a) that man is made of matter, (b) that God does not exist since he cannot be seen, (c) that for anything to exist, it must have a referent, thereby reinforcing the reference theory that no soul travels outside the body at death, and (d) that other human beings can be created through artificial means since there will be nothing sacrosanct about the mind.

On the other hand, if one is an idealist his views will be diametrically opposed to that of a materialist. Yet both of them live in the same world and have to do things together whether by design or accident. This forces us to want to probe further into ontology, so as to see how such disagreements in beliefs and attitudes can be minimized. Of course, no man can pretend to be unaffected by the conception of reality of his neighbour.

The second main justification for his paper lies in the fact that man wants to know more about himself and his world, so as to conquer psychological fears. The most pressing question at this juncture then is: Why have philosophers continued in an endless attempt to account for the constituents of our universe? The answer to this may vary as with the number of philosophers. But, we must note that the structure of our universe determines what becomes of us as humans.

However, the question of an enduring ontological framework constitutes the most basic question of life and existence. It can succinctly be stated that, philosophers and scientists are still at loggerheads as to the nature of the real world, i.e. does the real world consist of the macro objects, properties and occurrences encountered in everyday experience, or are these ordinary entities merely manifestations of an underlying reality of microphenomena as defined in the latest theories of science. This problem, as is well known, has been in the forefront of modern philosophical speculations since the 17<sup>th</sup> century revolution in science, although it was of concern also to the preSocratics, Plato and Aristotle. The lack of general agreement regarding a solution to this problem might well be a major source of man's present sense of ontological

estrangement and alienation.<sup>4</sup> But we must note that while this question hardly disrupts our everyday affairs, “its theoretical and psychological import is hardly insignificant.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Strawson's Ontology Of Basic Particulars**

Strawson's theory of basic particulars, which according to him, is an exercise in “Descriptive metaphysics and not revisionary metaphysics”, is an attempt to present a thorough-going materialist ontology. His ontology can be subsumed under physical realism<sup>6</sup> as well as a “radical kind of nominalism”, which recognizes only individuals and further posits that nothing exists,

*except concretely, and that therefore we should re-express all general statements in terms of the individuals which make them true. On this view, even to refer to classes or sets can be ontologically criminal, and since it involves a departure from the pure ontology of individual objects.*<sup>7</sup>

Physical realism, according to Norman Melchert, has both epistemological and ontological components. Epistemologically, the physical realist holds that the typical objects of perceptual experience, belief, and knowledge are independent in their being, of the subject:

*view they could exist unmodified even if the perceived objects is physical (in the sense that it is what a perfect physical science would tell us it is), and that neither the perceiver and knower is one of these physical things as well.<sup>10</sup>*

Strawson's major project in the first part of his book, *Individuals*<sup>11</sup>, was to debunk what he calls, revisionary metaphysics and provide a firm foundation in descriptive metaphysics. The preoccupation of revisionary metaphysicians such as Descartes, Leibniz and Berkeley was how metaphysics could be used to construct a better structure of the world.<sup>12</sup> This attempt, he believes, is bound to fail because no such structure can be produced.

On the other hand, he sees the legitimate task of metaphysics as descriptive. Descriptive metaphysics, to him, is not different as such from philosophical or logical, or conceptual analysis. However, it aims to lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure, it can take far less for granted than a limited and partial conceptual inquiry.<sup>13</sup>

Strawson believes that revisionary metaphysics is only useful to the extent that, it is at the service of descriptive metaphysics. We are not much concerned with the

implications which Strawson draws between revisionary and descriptive metaphysics. Rather, we are concerned with the implications Strawson draws from his analysis of descriptive metaphysics. These have to do with his position on basic particulars as the constituents of our universe, which commits us to a purely physicalist and materialist ontological framework.

Suffice it to note that, while the first part of Strawson's *Individuals* aims at establishing "the central position which material bodies and persons occupy among particulars in general, it shows that, in our conceptual scheme as it is, particulars of these two categories are the basic or fundamental particulars, that the concepts of other types of particulars must be seen as secondary in relation to these."<sup>14</sup>

Strawson begins the quest for basic particulars with the identification of particulars. To claim that anything exists, one of the conditions that must be met is our ability to identify it. We must be able to identify a thing among other things within our categories of space and time. He believes that we operate with the scheme of a single, unified spatio-temporal system. Thus, we say that "A" is not just the place where "B" was a thousand years ago. We must have the idea of a system of elements everyone of which, can be both

spatially and temporally related to every other.<sup>15</sup>

From the above, if we are to operate the scheme of a single unified spatio-temporal system or framework of particulars, it is essential that we should be able, sometimes, to identify particulars in the way just stated.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, we must have criteria or methods of identifying a particular encountered on one occasion, or described in respect of one occasion as the same individual particular encountered on another occasion or described in respect of another occasion.<sup>17</sup>

Strawson argues that not every category of particular objects which are recognized is competent to constitute such a framework. The only objects, according to him, which can constitute it are those, which can confer upon it, its own fundamental characteristics. In other words, they must be three dimensional objects, with some endurance through time. They must also be accessible to such means of observation as we have, and since those means are strictly limited in power, they must collectively have enough diversity, richness, stability and endurance to make possible and natural, just that conception of a single unitary framework which we possess.<sup>18</sup> According to Strawson,

*of the categories of objects which recognize only*

*those that satisfy these requirements which are, or possess, material bodies in a broad sense of the expression, material bodies constitute the framework. Hence, given certain general feature of the conceptual scheme which we possess, and given the character of the available major categories, things which are, or possess material bodies must be basic particulars.<sup>19</sup>*

Strawson, though unoblivious of the fact that we must often build up our single picture of the world through particular things or events<sup>20</sup>, nevertheless believes that:

*it is a single picture which we build, a unified structure, in which we ourselves have a place and in which every element is thought of as directly or indirectly related to every other; and the framework of the structure, the common, unifying system of relations is spatio-temporal. By means of identifying reference, we fit other people's reports and stories, along with our own, into the single story about empirical reality; and this fitting together, this connection, rests ultimately on relating the particulars which figure in the stories in the single spatio-temporal system which we ourselves occupy.<sup>21</sup>*

To buttress the importance of the locatability of events on basic particulars, he talks of a situation where someone told of a thing of certain kind, and of certain things that had happened to it. Now, if the person was asked to give details of where the events had happened and he could not do this, or replied instead that the events did not belong at all to our spatio-temporal system, that is, that they did not take place at any distance from here or at any distance of time from now, then Strawson urges us not to take such a person serious, for his position implies that the event in question did not really exist. We can only describe the event properly by showing the person how we operate with the concept of reality.

Strawson believes that in practice, not many purely visual occupiers of space are to be found.<sup>22</sup> The existence of such things as ghost are altogether questionable. Others such as shafts of light or volumes of coloured gas certainly do not satisfy the requirements of richness, endurance and stability. But in so far as "they are to be found, we do not hesitate to call them material bodies."<sup>23</sup> This means that there exists the theoretical possibility that the requirements of the argument might be met by a category of entities, which we should not call requirements of what we are ready to call material bodies.<sup>24</sup>

Because of the problem identified above, he suggests what he calls "a weak sense of material body" for which the supposed purely visual three-dimensional objects are allowed to qualify. Nevertheless, Strawson believes that, given a certain general feature of the conceptual scheme of particular identification which we have, it follows that material bodies must be basic particulars.<sup>25</sup>

Now, given the linguistic context in which we operate, the speaker and hearer often identify one particular by reference to another. Strawson terms this "identifying reference".<sup>26</sup> This means that the successful identification by a bearer of one particular, depends on his ability to identify another particular, which may be a basic one. These particulars, the dependent types of particulars are of two types. The first is the

*dependent type...class of what might be called 'private particulars' - comprising the perhaps overlapping groups of sensations, mental events, and in one common acceptance of this term, sense-data. The type on which it is dependent is the class person.*<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore,  
*on the other criteria than the present, private experiences have often been the most favoured*

*of candidates for the status of basic particulars; on the present criteria (Strawson's)<sup>28</sup> they are most obviously inadmissible.<sup>29</sup>*

The reason for not admitting private experiences as basic particulars is that the principle of individuation of such experiences essentially turns on the identities of the persons to whose histories they belong. For instance, a twinge of toothache or a private impression of red cannot in general be identified in our common language, except as the twinge which such and such an identified person suffered or is suffering, the impression which such and such an identified person had or is having.<sup>30</sup>

In summary, identifying references to 'private particulars' depend on identifying references to particulars of another type of altogether, namely persons.<sup>31</sup> One of the positions Strawson is trying to push is that, if there are basic particulars, then they must be publicly observable. However, he cautions that not all that is publicly observable can be basic particulars because some of them suffer from identifiability dependence. This position commits him into dividing publicly perceptible or publicly observable particulars into types or categories.<sup>32</sup> According to Strawson, "there are events and processes, states and conditions on the one hand, and of material bodies

or things possessing material bodies, on the other.”<sup>33</sup> He believes that events and processes, as we normally conceive them, are necessarily of, or performed or undergone by material bodies. This means that events and processes are dependent on basic materials such as material bodies (e.g. river banks) and persons. For instance, a death is necessarily the death of some creature. Hence,

*To signify a large class of particulars, states and conditions, events and processes are conceived of as necessarily states and conditions of, or as performed or suffered by particulars of other types, normally things which are or have material bodies.*<sup>34</sup>

Whether demonstratively or non-demonstratively, material bodies, in Strawson's ontology, play a unique and fundamental role in particular identification. While he believes that we do not, in ordinary conversation, make explicit, the referential frameworks we employ, we do indeed, often use demonstratives in reference to things in our immediate environments. Therefore, apart from demonstratives or quasi-demonstratives:

*it is proper names which tend to be the resting-places of reference to particulars, the point on which the descriptive phrases*

Thought pivot. Now, among particulars, the bearers par excellence of proper names are persons and places. It is conceptual truth... that places are defined by the relations of material bodies; and it is also a conceptual truth...that persons have material bodies.<sup>35</sup>

In an attempt to rule out some of our concepts as constituting basic particulars, he picks up the case of sound and argues that it does not constitute a basic particular. Sound, an auditory experience, is different from sight and touch experiences. Sounds may be said to have temporal relations to each other, and may vary in character in certain ways: in loudness, pitch and timbre.<sup>36</sup>

However, they have no intrinsic spatial characteristics. This means that such expressions as "to the left of", "spatially above", "nearer", "farther", have no intrinsically auditory significance.<sup>37</sup> The implication of this is that we cannot use a conceptual scheme which contains of purely auditory experience for the provision of objective particulars.

A similar argument will also rule out thoughts as basic particulars. The reason why thought, according to Strawson,

cannot constitute basic particulars is that thoughts are experienced as mine or his, and myself and himself can be identified only as basic particulars, persistent physical bodies in space and time.

Strawson's idea of persons as basic particulars is an inspiration from Kant. It is a "modest but still provocative reformulation of Kant's idea" that the self cannot just be understood empirically as an object relative to other objects in space, but as an absolute center of autonomous activity. For Strawson, the concept of a person is more complex than either a mind alone or a body alone; it must include both, if it is to be of a person at all.<sup>38</sup>

One fundamental question that emanates from the identification of basic particulars (material bodies and persons) is the issue of distinguishing a person (a basic material) from other things. And in doing this, Strawson attempts to exhibit the main features of a person which are the possession of a body and consciousness. But he concludes that the concept of a person is a primitive, complex and unanalyzable one.<sup>39</sup> These presuppositions will, of course, lead us into the mind-body problem and other related issues.

The goal is that Strawson is making an attempt to work towards a materialist, empiricist or naturalist ontology. It means his recorded success in proving the case of material bodies as basic particular is a catalyst also for his seeing a person as unanalyzable, invariably committing him to the view that consciousness and body of a person are unanalyzable concepts. And if this is the case, the concept of a person does not go beyond the material realm where this complexity subsists.

Also, Strawson's position will imply that in our conceptual framework, anything that does not have identifying reference, is a pseudo issue. But must every thing have identifying reference? And on what basis can we banish events and processes as part of our ontology? Furthermore, Strawson seems to be committed to a justificationist foundationalist epistemology. This is because he sees the basic particulars as those to which identifying references are made, which themselves do not need any 'identifying' reference.

#### **Some Problems In Strawson's Position**

Let us now consider some of the problems inherent in Strawson's position, particularly on the pre-eminence he gives to basic particulars (material bodies and persons).

The identification of particulars in hearer-speaker situation introduced by Strawson, presupposes the notion of referring which is not itself examined.<sup>40</sup> For instance, there are many referring expressions that a speaker may use, for which it may be highly unclear and uncertain, what sense can be attached to the formula, say "the basic particular 'X' which answers to the description contained in E."<sup>41</sup> This is likely going to be the case with direct demonstrative reference, which central in Strawson's thesis.

The unparalleled confidence which Strawson has in the spatio-temporal particulars could be challenged. Strawson inherited this notion of a unique system of one temporal and three spatial dimensions as the framework of all empirical reality from Kant.<sup>42</sup> But while this system is more or less naturalistic, it still leaves out some scientific canons. For instance, it is perhaps unduly simple to deal with all that natural science might want to say about either sub-atomic particles or astronomical events.<sup>43</sup> Of course, while Strawson will agree that these sub-atomic particles are part of our conceptual scheme, these theoretical entities of science seem not to be accounted for, by Strawson's notion of direct identification, or identifying reference.

Strawson also asserts, that given the spatio-temporal order

of things, we, as persons, know our own place within this framework. By implication, he is suggesting that we need no identifying reference to be able to determine our place in the world. This assumption may not be totally correct. It is the case that one cannot completely know his own place in the world without reference to other particulars and individuals. By individuals we mean other things that make up our ontology such as universals, events, and objects.

A thorough perusal of Strawson's *Individuals*<sup>44</sup> gives us the impression that persons and material bodies are what primarily exist.<sup>45</sup> For instance, Strawson asserts that the identification of theoretical particles in physics depends on the identification of macroscopic material bodies.

Strawson, it has been argued, seems to be concerned with the structural dependencies in language in so far as these are concerned with presuppositions of existence; that is, with what things we must take as nonexistent, if we are to take other things as existent. But this position raises other questions. For instance, what are we to take as existent? Is it the case that macroscopic material bodies have more priority than microscopic theoretical particles of physics, when it comes to the question of existence?

While Strawson insists that all particulars are strictly

empirical, he seems not to completely disownenance universals as he believes that they are individuals because they can be referred to, but certainly they are not basic particulars.

Strawson also attempts to justify the subject-predicate distinction which was denied by Quine. According to Strawson, the idea of the introduction of the subject term into a proposition is based on and presupposes a statement of empirical fact, whereas the introduction of the predicate or universal term does not.<sup>46</sup>

Concerning the notion of person, there seems to be an unclarity about what a person is, since a person is said to be a type of entity such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type.<sup>47</sup> One of the contentions here are: can we restrict the ascription of predicates to persons alone? If it has to do with feeling etc, is it not the case that other animals feel pain? In what ways can we differentiate persons from other living things?

Furthermore, there is a problem with his position that the concept of a person is an unanalyzable one. The

consequences have been stated as follows:

*It encourages him (Strawson) to divorce states of consciousness from bodily states in a way that invites the Cartesian spectre in at the back door while Strawson is wheedling it out of the front. He introduces, for instance, again without explanation, the notion of perceptual experience, and argues that it is a contingent fact that our perceptual experience is connected in the way it is, with our bodies. In support of this, he suggests that it is logically possible that there should be a subject of perceptual experience... Thus Strawson's Cartesian conception of some P-predicates to a certain extent undermines the general tenor of his argument.<sup>48</sup>*

The influence of Kant on Strawson in his descriptive metaphysics, which leads to his ontology of basic particulars, is quite obvious. Strawson was influenced by Kant's transcendental method.<sup>49</sup> This is because both of them agree that it is bootless (useless) to begin with the world and then ask how it is possible to think about it,

*For any posing of the world as a topic presupposes that it is a world thought about, a world experienced. We must begin with how we actually think about the world and experience it sensuously and then ask how*

*this is possible; i.e., what must our concepts be like if our experience is to be what it is.<sup>50</sup>*

In spite of the Kantian influence on Strawson, his thesis is said to contain some doctrinal polarity which pits realism against idealism.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, the relevant realism which Strawson advocates is latitudinarian physical realism. This is the doctrine that asserts that

*existence in space and time characterizes the most basic (though not necessarily all) items with which we have dealings... Strawson's ontological views are not arrived at by posing the stark 'what is there?, but rather by asking what conditions for (particular) identification. The answer offered is that material bodies are basic to particular identification, these being three dimensional objects with some endurance through time... which possesses some qualities of the factual range.<sup>52</sup>*

Furthermore, Strawson is also said to be doctrinally, a naturalist. For he believes that it is not merely for reasons of convenience or lack of alternative that we begin with the conceptual scheme expressed in and by ordinary language. His doctrinal tendency is realistic on account of the strong realistic association of the natural conceptual apparatus.<sup>53</sup> However, in spite of his naturalist apparatus, his approach is

often unnatural. For instance, when an account of some concept has doctrinally unpalatable consequences, Strawson neutralizes any putative threat by treating these consequences as merely methodological.<sup>54</sup>

### **Some Theories Of Ontological Relativity**

In this section, we take a cursory look at some relativists' approach to ontology. The works of Ludwig Wittgenstein on forms of life and language games<sup>55</sup> have been a point of departure for most of the attacks on the foundationalist tendency in metaphysics and epistemology. Reality, according to Wittgenstein, is tied to our language manual through which we see the world. Hence, this sort of framework allows us to talk about paradigms other than science which has been dominant and taken as exact.

In a similar vein, Thomas Kuhn's theory of normal and abnormal science<sup>56</sup>, Paul Feyerabend's methodical anarchism or Dadaism<sup>57</sup>, Peter Winch's relativistic understanding of primitive culture<sup>58</sup>, Donald Davidson's theory of conceptual scheme which embraces the principle of charity,<sup>59</sup> as well as his recent essay on the ontology of events and actions,<sup>60</sup> are indications that Strawson's foundationalist ontology based on physicalism is no longer adequate.

A more fundamental approach to a relativistic ontology was Quine's theory of ontological relatively which has remained elegant for quite some time. According to Quine, "both philosophy and science aim at discovering what there is. But neither can claim to discover what there is in a theory independent way".<sup>61</sup>

He believes that we can only determine what there is, according to one theory or another, and different theories can assume or require different kinds of things. In other words, he seems to imply that there is no single right answer to the question 'what is there?' Because how satisfactory one answer is going to be depends on what kinds of things we can manage without and what kinds of things we cannot dispense with.<sup>62</sup>

R. Rorty and H. Putnam attempt to situate a manageable ontology within the ambit of our language. In fact, they attempt to reduce all the problems to linguistic ones following recent development in hermeneutics, post modernism and post structuralism. Rorty, for instance, talks about final vocabularies.<sup>63</sup> This is borne out of the Wittgenstein's dictum that "the limits of my language is the limit of my world."<sup>64</sup>

In his book, *Objectivity, Relativity and Truth*, Rorty offers

an anti-representationalist account of the relation between the natural science and the rest of culture.<sup>65</sup> The anti-representationalism here implies the position which does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality.

### **A Case for a Coherentist Metaphysics**

Attempts are made in this section to present an outline of a coherentist metaphysics. From the preceding sections, we can draw the following inferences. First, that recent theories in metaphysics and epistemology have moved beyond foundationalist discourse such as Strawson was trying to suggest through his ontology of basic particulars. Secondly, there has been a rethink on seeing science as the only way for accounting for the flux of experience. At least, Quine's theory of ontological relativity is a good reference point. Thirdly, most contemporary ontological theories revolve around language and mind. It is believed that it is through our mind with the help of language that we fashion out reality. In spite of the appeal of the relativist theories, we can say that they are inadequate to account for our ontology because the relativist approaches see various facets of reality such as science, religion and socio-cultural factors as mutually exclusive.

A more adequate ontology should be such that incorporates

of all facets of reality into one. It should be mutually inclusive. This is claimed because all the parts are necessarily noncontributory to the whole. No part however big, is big enough to constitute a whole. It is only a part of the whole.

This claim has been reinforced by some philosophers but in different ways. Parmenides, an ancient Greek philosopher, once argued that "Being is, not being is not."<sup>66</sup> The import of this claim is that anything that exists at all is part of the ultimate reality. However, we think that these various aspects have their independent existence because we are presented with what can be called partial truths or mere appearances which fall short of the ultimate reality.

The coherentist metaphysics is integrative because it recognizes the functional roles of science, language, mind, myth, human nature, religion and cultural factors in arriving at truth. All play a complementary role.

Immanuel Kant recognizes the integrative nature of reality when he opines that "what exists, exists: its nature simply is what it is; with that, we ourselves can have nothing to do."<sup>67</sup>

But we are forced to think that reality is not unitary because our knowledge falls short of the actual ontological status of what exists. In other words, we do not know the real world as it is, but only know what is presented to us through our

In his book, *Objectivity, Relativity and Truth*, Rorty offers

sensibility, understanding and reason. And in coming to describe reality, we classify, interpret, categorize and describe it in a particular manner. The way we see reality is equally affected by our sense organs and language.<sup>67</sup>

2. A. R. Lacey, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (London,

The emphasis is that reality is one and our human faculties and capacities make no difference to this ultimate reality. However, our descriptions vary because we do not operate within the same framework. The coherentist ontology can further be substantiated by the fact that we often draw distinction between primary qualities and secondary qualities, between substance and its attributes. But a critical probing into these distinctions will show that one cannot be totally separated from the other without some form of inconsistency.<sup>68</sup> In other words, we cannot talk of primary qualities without talking about secondary qualities. This shows that in order to account for reality, we must present a consistent picture of all the variables involved. In the words of F. H. Bradley:

*all appearances must belong to reality. For what appears is, and whatever is, cannot fall outside the real... everything which appears, is somehow real in such a way as to be self-consistent. The character of the real is to possess everything phenomenal in a harmonious form. Reality is one in this sense that it*

*has a positive nature exclusive of discord, a nature which must hold throughout everything that is to be real. This diversity can be diverse only so far as not to clash...<sup>69</sup>*

The coherentist ontology is reinforced by Quine's notion of interior field.<sup>70</sup> According to Quine, the totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs is man made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Quine states further that, no particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.<sup>71</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The thesis of coherentist metaphysics is likely to be confronted with some inherent problems. For instance, it can be regarded as another form of idealism. This objection can be addressed by replying that it is both a rehabilitation of materialism and idealism. But what seems to be very important is that coherentist metaphysics as a thesis on ontology, must meet the canons of rationality and must be pragmatic in an attempt to account for reality. It is on this basis, that we recommend the coherentist ontology as an alternative to Strawson's ontology of basic particulars.

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29. Strawson, *Individuals*, Op.cit., p.41.
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**REFERENCE AND DESCRIPTION:  
AN EXAMINATION OF  
TWO PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS**

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Most current discussions on the philosophy of language deal with reference. Reference is this important because philosophers typically think that the principal way in which language attaches to reality is through reference. It is widely thought that the basic structure of language is subject-predicate and that this could be correlated with the reality.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the subject term stands for particular while the predicate term stands for universal. Of the two terms, "subject term" has attracted more of the attention of logicians. This explains why many have involved themselves in difficulties about logical subjects, which have led them to the logically disastrous theories of names.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophers have traditionally been concerned with whether anything that we believe or say is true. They seem to hold that if anything is true, then, language must somehow attach or refer to the world. The issue then is to decide whether the subject expressions attach or refer to the world or reality, directly or indirectly. This becomes even more difficult when one realizes that not only proper names can function as subject expressions. Description also can be the logical subject of a sentence. Do descriptions refer directly or indirectly to objects described? In other words, can we say

descriptions have referential role to play in language? In this paper, I shall discuss two philosophical views on this problem, namely, those of Russell and Strawson.<sup>3</sup> I shall try, following Donnellian<sup>4</sup>, to provide a Hegelian-like synthesis of the two views and conclude that neither one is absolutely right nor wrong.

Russell identifies two types of description, definite and indefinite descriptions. Definite description is of the form of "the so-and-so", while indefinite description is of the form of "a-so-and-so". Example of an indefinite description is "a man", while that of a definite description is "the King of France".<sup>5</sup> It is Russell's argument that definite or indefinite descriptions cannot function as the logical subjects. That is, sentences in which they occur are not subject-predicate sentences. Rather, the propositions they express are complex kind of existential propositions, part of which might be described as a uniquely existential proposition. They are grammatical subjects of sentences, which are genuinely of the subject-predicate form.<sup>6</sup>

A name is a simple symbol whose meaning is something that can only occur as subject - an individual or a particular. A name therefore, is a simple symbol directly designating an individual which is its meaning and having this meaning in its own right independently of the meanings of all other words. An expression intended to be a logically proper name is meaningless unless there is some single object for which it stands. The meaning of such an expression is just the individual object which the expression designates. To be a name at all, therefore, it must designate something. A description on the other hand, is not a proper name. It is a

denoting phrase. A proposition containing a description is not identical with what that proposition becomes when a name is substituted, even if the name names the same object as the description describes. For instance, "Scott is the author of Waverley", is obviously a different proposition from "Scott is Scott". The latter is a trivial truism and the former is a factual truth.<sup>7</sup>

Russell, in his theory of description, explains the meaning of propositions containing descriptions. These are the forms of "a so-and-so" and the "so-and-so". The proposition of "a-so-and-so", always correspond to that of "the so-and-so". His example of the proposition of "the so-and-so" is "the king of France is wise". But there is no king of France. Hence propositions of the form "the so-and-so" are not always true. For it to be true, it is necessary that "the so-and-so" should exist. It then follows, that a description cannot function as the real subject of the proposition (as a logically proper name). For, it has no constituent represented by the phrase. Yet "the king of France is wise" is a significant proposition. What then is the meaning of propositions, which contain ambiguous descriptions or denoting phrases?

According to Russell, a denoting phrase is essentially part of a sentence, and does not, like most single words, have any significance on its own account. If I say, "Scott was a man," it is a statement of the form "X" was a man and it has "Scott" for its subject. But if I say "the author of Waverley was a man", it is not a statement of the "X was a man", and it does not have "the author of Waverley" for its subject. We may put in place of "the author of Waverley was a man", the following one and only one entity wrote Waverley, and that was a man. So if we

wish to say that the author of Waverley had the property “ $u$ ”, what we wish to say is equivalent to “one and only one entity wrote Waverley, and that one had the property  $\psi$ .<sup>8</sup>

According to Russell therefore, anyone who asserts, “the king of France is wise”, would be asserting that:

- (i) There is a king of France
- (ii) There is not more than one king of France
- (iii) There is nothing in which the king of France is not wise.

These are necessary conditions for anyone who asserted the above to make a true proposition. However, the assertion is false since there is no king of France. This is because uttering the sentence would mean uttering a conjunction. And, since one of its conjuncts is false, the conjunction itself is false. This is how the assertion can be significant even though it is false. It is significant even though, it is false. Its significance depends on the fact that it is an existential statement of some kind and not a subject-predicate sentence.<sup>9</sup> The fact that description is possible - that we are able, by the employment of concepts, to designate a thing which is not a concept - is due to a logical relation between some concepts and some terms, in virtue of which such concepts inherently and logically denote such terms.

An object may be presented to the mind, without our knowing any concept of which the said object is the instance; and the discovery of such a concept is not a mere improvement in notation. The reason why this appears to be the case is that, as soon as the definition is found, it becomes wholly unnecessary to the meaning to remember

the actual object defined, since only concept are relevant to our deduction.<sup>10</sup> Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions, therefore, is an attempt to avoid the unsavory ontological entailments of descriptive phrases by transmuting them, using quantifiers and variables, into incomplete symbols, which acquire meaning only in content and have no significance on their own.

Strawson, on the other hand, makes a distinction between a sentence, the use of a sentence and the utterance of a sentence. This distinction also applies to expressions of the sort Russell calls "the-so-and so. The main argument of Strawson is that expressions used in the uniquely referring way, fall into neither logically proper names nor descriptions as used by Russell's analysis. A sentence or an expression can be uttered on different occasions. Its use on different occasions may differ. It might be used to make a true proposition on one occasion, and a false proposition on another. It is possible to use the sentence to talk about different people. It is equally possible for two different people to make the same use of one sentence, as one wrote it and the other spoke it.<sup>11</sup>

It therefore follows, that we cannot talk of the sentence or the expression as being true or false. We can only talk of its being used to make a true or false assertion or to express a true or false proposition. Also, we cannot talk of the sentence or the expression as being about a particular person. This is because the same sentence or expression may be used at different times, to talk about quite different particular persons. So, we can only use or talk about the use of a sentence or an expression to talk about particular person.

Therefore, we use the expression to mention or refer to a particular person in the course of using the sentence to talk about him. Expression cannot be said to mention or refer to anything. The same expression can have different mentioning uses as the same sentence can be used to make statements with different truth-values.

Mentioning or referring is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do. Mentioning or referring to something, is a characteristic use of an expression, just as “being about” something and truth or falsity, are characteristic use of a sentence.<sup>12</sup> Strawson argues, that Russell's theory confuses these two points, when he thinks that “the King of France is bold,” is simply false, because there is no king of France; France is not a monarchy. For Strawson, meaning is a function of the sentence or expression, mentioning and referring and true or falsity are functions of the use of the sentence or expression. It is not the sentence or expression that is true or false, but the use of it.

To give the meaning of an expression is to give general direction for its use, to refer to or mention particular objects or persons. To give the meaning of a sentence is to give general directions for its use in making true or false assertions. It is not to talk about any particular occasion of the use of the sentence or expression. Meaning is not reference. The meaning of an expression is not the set of things or the single thing it may correctly be used to refer to; the meaning is the set of rules, habits, and conventions to which its use is referring. The sentence “the king of France is bold,” is significant. But this does not mean that any particular use of it is true or false. We use it truly or falsely.

when we use it to talk about some one; when we are in fact mentioning someone.

When we utter "the King of France is bold", the sentence is significant, but it fails to say anything true or false since it fails to mention. It is significant because it could be used to make a true or false assertion. Its significance is just that it could be uttered in certain circumstances to mention a particular person; and to know its meaning is to know what sort of circumstances these are. Such an expression does not assert or entail a uniquely existential proposition. The use of "such and such", is only a signal, it does not state or assert, but only shows that we are, or intend to be, referring to one particular individual. Which particular individual, is a matter to be determined from the context, time and place and any other features of the situation of utterance.<sup>13</sup>

My critique of Russell and Strawson will be based on Donnellian correct identification of two possible uses of definite descriptions. According to Donnellan, definite descriptions can have two functions, namely, referential or attributive and ascriptive uses. In one and the same sentence, descriptions can function in either way, on different occasions of its use. Descriptions, in their attributive use, are to state something about whoever or whatever are the so-and-so. In this sense, descriptions occur essentially in sentences, that is, the thing described should be of a certain kind, that is, have certain characteristics. So, if it asserts, "the  $\varphi$  is  $\psi$ ," in the attributive use, the attribute of being the so-and-so (the  $\psi$ ) is all important. Therefore, in the attributive use, if nothing is the  $\varphi$ , then nothing has been said to be  $\varphi$ . This is what Russell seems to recognize and he may be right on this.

On the other hand, descriptions in their referential use, are to enable our audience pick out whom or what we are talking about and state something about the person or thing. The thing should be in a certain relation to the speaker and to the context of utterance.<sup>14</sup> For instance, in the use of “I”, the contextual requirement is that the thing should be identical with the speaker. In the referential use of definite descriptions, the descriptions do not occur essentially. The attributes of being the so-and-so are not all important. The fact that nothing is  $\varphi$  does not have the consequence it has in the attributive use, namely, that nothing has been said to have a certain property, say  $\psi$ . We may be speaking about  $\varphi$ , even though, it is wrongly identified. In the case of referential use of definite descriptions, there can be misdescription of that, which one wants to refer. In the attributive use, there is not the same possibility of misdescription. If a definite description is used non-referentially, then one fails to say anything true. Therefore, correct attributive use is a part of what is stated by such a use. This is not so with the correct referring use of definite description.<sup>15</sup> This distinction is very important to our discussion. It will show why Russell and Strawson may not be absolutely right or wrong in their views. To show this, let us point out certain assumptions implicit in their views concerning definite descriptions as referring expressions.

First, they both assume that we can ask how a description functions in some sentence independently of a particular occasion upon which it is used. This assumption may not be very clear in Strawson's argument against Russell. He says “mentioning” or “referring” is not something an expression

has to do. Here, he is denying the radical view that a genuine referring expression has a referent, functions to refer, independent of the context of some use of the expression. The denial of this view, however, does not entail that definite descriptions cannot be identified as referring expression in a sentence unless the sentence is being used. Strawson's view allows us to speak of the referential function of a definite description in a sentence, even when it is not being used.<sup>7</sup> This assumption is a mistake.

Another mistaken assumption implicit in their views is to the effect that when a description is used, something must fit the description. A person who uses a description must imply or presuppose that something fits the description. And, where the implication is false, the truth-value of what the speaker says is affected. For Russell, the sentence is false, and for Strawson, the sentence has no truth-value. But, if we admit the fact that descriptions can have two possible uses, the truth value is affected differently in each case by the falsity of the implication, that is, when nothing fits the description. This point is very important. It shows that Russell and Strawson may be correct in their views about the non-referential (attributive) use, but wrong in their views about the referential use of definite descriptions. This observation may not be surprising about Russell's view. He did not even recognize the referential use of definite descriptions. However, for Strawson, it is very surprising since this is what he tries to explain and defend.

To argue our point, we can consider some uses of definite descriptions, which carry neither any hint of a referential use

nor any presupposition or implication that something fits to the descriptions. It is possible, for instance, for two different persons to use the same expression to ask these questions. (i) "Is de Gaulle the King of France?" and (ii) "Is the King of France, de Gaulle?" If the first question is asked by someone who is in doubt as to whether de Gaulle is King or President of France, he can be answered that "the king of France does not exist". There seems to be no presupposition or implication that someone is the king of France. And, the person who gives the answer is not attempting to refer to someone. But somebody who intends to refer to someone may ask the second question. Here, the question carries a presupposition or implication that somebody fits the description. It is only when descriptions have referring roles that such implication is made. Since Strawson only recognizes a referential use of definite description, his view cannot be correct about the non-referential use of definite descriptions.

Another example will show the falsity of the second assumption. We may consider a case of vandalism of equipment. Given the importance of electricity, we may describe the act thus; "the vandals of electrical equipment are wicked." If we do not know, and it is possible we don't know, who the vandals are, we have only used the descriptions attributively. The contrast with such a use of

the sentence is one of those situations in which we expect and intend our audience to realize whom we have in mind, when we speak of the vandals, and most importantly, to know that it is these persons about whom we are going to say something.

Assuming a group of people were arrested by the police. From their looks, they appeared very wicked, but they are not the actual vandals. If someone asks to whom we are referring by using this description, the answer here, is that, it is the people arrested. This is the referential use of identifying the person we want to talk about. It is quite possible for the correct identification to be made, even though no one fits the description we used. So, the fact that these people are not the vandals does not imply that nothing has been said about them. We have talked about some people even though they do not fit the description used.<sup>16</sup>

In the referential use of a definite description, we may succeed in picking out a person or thing, to ask a question about, even though, he or it does not really fit the description. But in the attributive use, if nothing fits the description, no straightforward answer to the question can be given. When a definite description is used attributively in a command or question, and nothing fits the description, the command cannot be obeyed and the question cannot be answered. The result is that the assertion is either true or false. So, Strawson may be right in this sense; but this cannot be so for referential

use of definite descriptions. If nothing fits the description it does not follow, without further argument, the speaker has failed to refer to anything. Our arguments have shown, that many things he said about proper names can be said about the referential use of definite descriptions.

Thus, the gulf which Russell saw between names and descriptions may not be as wide as he thought. Again, Russell holds that there is a logical entrainment when a description is used. “The  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ ” entails “there exists one and only one  $\psi$ ”. This may be true of the attributive use, it is not true of the referential use of definite description. The “implication” that something is the  $\phi$  does not amount to an entailment. It is more like a presumption based on what is usually true of the use of definite description to refer.

Russell's theory does not show that the implication that something is the  $\phi$  comes from the more specific implication that what is being referred to is the  $\psi$ . Hence, as a theory of definite description, Russell's view seems to apply, if at all, to the attributive use only. Russell seems to think that whenever we use descriptions as opposed to proper names, we introduce an element of generality, which ought to be absent, if what we are doing is referring to some particular thing. This is clear from his analysis of definite description. One conclusion that may be drawn from that analysis, is that such sentences express what are, in reality, completely general propositions; there is a  $\psi$  and only as such, and any  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ . This might be expressed in a different way as thus; if there is anything which might be identified as reference here, it is reference in a very weak sense,

namely, reference to whatever is the one and only one  $\psi$ , if there is any such. From our discussion, this is something we might well say about the attributive use of definite descriptions. This lack of particularity is absent from the referential use of definite descriptions, precisely because the description is here merely a device for getting one's audience to pick out or think of the thing to be spoken about, a device which may serve its function even if the description is incorrect.

### Endnotes And References

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4. See Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" in *Philosophical Review*, 75, 1996 pp. 281-304.
5. B. Russell, op. cit. pp. 45-47.
6. Have "The King of France" Denotes a Null Class, B. Russell, op. cit. p. 47.
7. Ibid.
8. Op. cit. p. 51.
9. Op. cit. p. 54.
10. See. B. Russell, *The Principle of Mathematics*, op. cit p. 48.
11. See. P. F. Strawson, op. cit. pp. 27-31.
12. Op. cit. P.31.
13. Op. cit. p. 39.
14. Keith Donnellan, op. cit. pp. 284-285.
15. Op. cit. p. 286.
16. Linsky has correctly pointed out that one does not fail to refer simply because the description used does not infact fit anything (or fits more than one thing). See Leonard Linsky - "Reference and Referents", in *Philosophy and Ordinary Language*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p.p75-80.

## A CRITIQUE OF THE ANALYTIC TREND IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

by

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### **Abstract**

The history of African philosophy as a distinct academic discipline in African, nay Nigerian Universities, has no doubt, witnessed a lot of controversies, debates, arguments and counter-arguments, bordering essentially, on the problems of methodology and content or subject-matter<sup>1</sup>. This is understandable because the discipline of African philosophy, apart from being relatively new and unknown to some of those engaged in the debate, also needs to be properly defined in order to avoid any conceptual confusion.

Also couched in the debate is the question of the philosophical status of African traditional belief systems, which is still a bone of contention and can be used as a basis for grouping African philosophers into different schools of thought<sup>2</sup> or orientations. Although the debate may have subsided, as it is accepted that African philosophy exists,

yet some recent developments in Western philosophy have aroused a revisiting of dead issues. But is there really any dead issue in philosophy? For it is claimed that no philosophical questions, unlike mathematical ones, end on Q.E.D.

In this paper, attempt is made to state the respective positions of the two dominant currents or trends in African philosophy. In the main, I argue, following the emerging trends in Western philosophy, particularly Rorty's pragmatism, that the position of the analytic African philosophers is inadequate and should be rejected because it seems to ignore the inseparability of culture from human experience and the crucial role which culture plays in sustainable development.

### **Restating the Dispute**

The question of the philosophical status of African traditional thought systems, just like "the urge to practise philosophy in accordance with some fairly defined goals," without necessarily jettisoning its utilitarian relevance to the society,<sup>3</sup> has torn professional philosophers in Africa into different directions or orientations. For the sake of brevity, two orientations will concern us in this paper.

### African Ethnophilosophy

The first orientation, which Bodunrin calls *traditionalists* or *ethnophilosophers*, according to Hountondji, seeks, among other things, to discover authentic African ideas and thought systems uninfluenced by alien accretions<sup>4</sup>. In other words, it is their contention that African philosophy is the traditional philosophy, which has been inherited by contemporary Africans through their oral traditions, world-views, myths, folklores, etc. For them, the preoccupation of the African philosopher is to collect, interpret and disseminate African proverbs, myths, folktales, and other traditional materials of philosophical nature. It is clear from this brief summary of the position of this group, that they would accept a definition of philosophy that is broad or general to include African traditional world-views. Hence, it is their belief that philosophy is no more than the collective experience of a people, their '*Weltanschauung!*'. This point is well stated by Onyewuenyi, a member of this school of thought when he says:

*Philosophizing is a universal experience every culture has its own world-view, if you study the history of philosophy, you will find there is no agreement on the definition of philosophy. (But) what is generally order among the various phenomena of the surrounding world...*

Obviously, our traditionalist group attempts in the main to derive a collective philosophy that is common and peculiar to all Africans from the welter of African forms of cultural expression. The effort of this group debunks the then popular, but erroneous ideas, or what Onyewuenyi calls, a picture of racist propaganda<sup>6</sup> popularized in European 'dehumanized, philosophical circles, to the effect that, African people manifested a child-like or pre-logical mentality<sup>7</sup>. It has been shown that no adult human being can avoid the necessity of thinking or that the ability for thinking is a special privilege granted to special people in special cultures<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the expressed intention of the traditionalists is to, among other things, promote an understanding of what existence or reality as experienced in African culture, means to African thoughts through an exposition of its underlying assumptions<sup>9</sup>. So much for the exposition of the position of the traditionalist programme. Let us examine briefly the views of the other dominant strand in African philosophy.

#### **Universalist-Analytic African Philosophy**

The modernist<sup>10</sup> or universalist<sup>11</sup> or analytic<sup>12</sup> orientation, in conscious opposition to the claims of the traditionalists, argues that Africa is in urgent need of development, and since development and modernization cannot be achieved in the contemporary world without science and technology,

then African philosophy ought to keep faith with modern developments in science and technology and also make possible for those conditions necessary for scientific and technological development to be engendered in African societies. Wiredu, a member of the analytic school, expresses this point when he says that:

*The habits of exactness and rigour in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach characteristic of science are attributes of mind which we, in Africa, urgently need to cultivate not just because they are themselves intellectual virtues, but also because they are necessary conditions for rapid modernization<sup>13</sup>.*

Wiredu thinks that the African philosopher should be interested in areas such as logic and the philosophies of science and mathematics, which already have solid foundations in the West, where modern developments in human knowledge have gone farthest and where, consequently, philosophy is in close touch with the conditions of the modernization which he urgently desires for this continent<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, with a universalist conception of philosophy, these

African logical neo-positivists<sup>15</sup>, to borrow Momoh's phrase, see philosophy as a rational critical study of which argumentation and clarification are essential elements. Their argument is that, since the traditional world-views identified with African philosophy by the traditionalists do not meet these standards, then they cannot be philosophy. The universalist-analytic African philosophers may not be objecting to the idea of abstracting African Philosophy from African world-views or culture (e.g. Bodunrin and Wiredu), what they are saying in the final analysis, is that, these world-views must be critically examined, analyzed, rigorously argued for and documented, if they are to be acceptable as philosophy in a universal sense. In other words, it is their contention that these world-views cannot, in their uncritical and unanalyzed forms, constitute African philosophy.

### **Deconstructive Strategy of Rorty and Others**

One cannot deny that our universalist-analytic trend endorses the adoption of the analytic approach in African Philosophy. The acceptance of the analytic approach in African Philosophy seems to justify their claims that African world-views do not possess such essential ingredients as philosophy in a universal sense, namely; a written tradition, an individual's as opposed to group or communal ideas or thoughts, critical, rigorous, argumentative and analytical

method, and rational, logical and scientific approach, etc. As it is clear, now that these notions which our analytic African philosophers hold dearly, have become essentially contested in the philosophical circles.

Again, the analytic approach cannot be representative of all the methods of doing philosophy, since some might insist that the procedure of doing philosophy is conversational or dialogical. This point is noticeable in the attitude of the pre-Socratic philosophers who, out of curiosity and wonder, reflected on the various phenomena of the surrounding world apparently to discover the common stuff that sustains them.

It is now familiar that the insights of the post-empiricist philosophy of science tend not only to revise our belief in science as the only paradigmatic mode, but also that there can be other forms of knowledge than the natural science. In this connection, some post-empiricist philosophers of science like Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend and Mary Hesse have argued for the acceptance of other forms of knowledge into our theories of knowledge, truth and ontology<sup>16</sup>.

Similarly, the analytic philosophy, which seems to be the fulcrum upon which our universalists arguments revolve,

has been brought into question. In particular, Richard Rorty, in a seminal work, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, has argued that analytic philosophy, which is a legacy of classical philosophy, has, itself, come to its end and has to be abandoned. Rorty's swipe against this tradition is informed by its pretensions to the effect that philosophy is a foundational discipline, which provides justification for all other areas of discourse. Needless to say, what Rorty sets out to do is to deconstruct philosophy. According to him, philosophy, since Descartes, has been dominated by epistemology and it is a legacy bequeathed to philosophy by Descartes, Locke and Kant.

Their views, taken together, compel us to see the business of philosophy as that of investigating the foundations of the sciences, the arts, culture, and morality and adjudicate the cognitive claims of these areas. It is the view that:

*Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims. It can do so because it understands the foundations of knowledge and it finds these foundations in the study of man as knower... or the activity of representations which make knowledge possible<sup>17</sup>.*

The point here is, that philosophy as epistemology, must set

universal standards of rationality and objectivity for all actual and possible claims to knowledge.

Rorty, however, rejects this and claims that philosophy is ill-suited to perform this task because philosophy, like all other discourses, has its own presuppositions. Hence, it is not the task of philosophy to adjudicate on matters that are beyond its discourse. He argues further, adopting a pragmatist position, that truth is relative to societal agreements. In other words, an assertion is true and justified if and only if it is warranted by the epistemic norms of the relevant society. The idea here, is that epistemic justification is a matter of social practice and knowledge too, is not a matter of social sort of correspondence between you and the thing you claim to know, but a matter of whether your claim to know coheres with a certain social practice, a language-game, world-view governing such claims.

It is important to note that the kind of coherence here is not the internal coherence of an individual's belief, but rather, the coherence of a given belief or knowledge-claim with collective beliefs and practices of the epistemic community to which one belongs. Thus, the community is the source of all epistemic authority<sup>18</sup>. What Rorty attempts here can be

described as 'epistemological behaviourism', that is, "explaining rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former."<sup>19</sup> Here, there is a sense in which we can say that Rorty's pragmatism is a 'frank and unapologetic admission of a sort of community-bound way of looking at the world'.<sup>20</sup>

Now, if the claim that epistemic notions like truth, rationality and justification are relative to the community is accepted, then philosophers, according to Rorty, should better forget the attempt to essentialise these notions because they do not have an essence. The danger in what Rorty says here, is that some critics might charge him with relativism. However, he claims that his position does not lead to philosophical relativism in the traditional philosophical sense, in which it means that every 'belief is as good as every other'.<sup>21</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

Now, let us tie the thread of our argument thus far, by saying that the position of the universalist orientation in denying philosophical status to traditional African systems of thought because they lack argumentative and logical rigour, obviously betrays their methodological bias towards Western analytical philosophy. This tradition, as stated above, has been severely challenged and its privileged

status removed because there is no fixed method in philosophy. Hence, Rorty characterizes philosophy, following Wilfrid Sellars, as 'an attempt to see how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together'.

Our universalist group's reliance on the method of analytic tradition in western philosophy as a model to be adopted in African philosophy, seems to commit a reductionist fallacy, apart from the fact that such method has been shown to have broken down, following the insights of the post-empiricist philosophers of science and post-modernist thinkers. Hence, the position of this group is not particularly rewarding and even unlikely to promote the growth of African philosophy in the same manner in which our ethnophilosophy or traditionist orientation - whose insistence that the practice of philosophy must at all cost, reflect the African cultural experience - would.

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3. Godwin Sogolo, *Foundations of African Philosophy A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1993), p. 2.
4. P. O. Bodunrin (ed.) *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives* (Ile-Ife Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1985), p. XI
5. Innocent Onyewuenyi, "Is There an African Philosophy?" in *Journal of African Studies* Vol. 3 No. 4. (1975), p. 521.
6. Ibid. p. 516.
7. For this position, see Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, translated by Lilain A. Clare (New York; The Macmillian Co., 1923)
8. K. C. Anyanwu, *The African Experience in the American Market Place, A Searing Indictment of Western Scholars and their Distortion of African Culture*, (New York: Exposition Press, 1983), p. 51.
9. Quoted in Olusegun Oladipo, "The debate on African Philosophy: A Critical Survey" in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XIX, NO. 1 (1992), p.

- 44.
10. This group is called as such because of its members' training and conception of philosophy, see, for example, P. O. Bodunrin op. cit., p.XIII; Barry Hallen "Analytic African Philosophy: What's Does It Mean?" in *Quest* Vol. X. No.2 December (1996), pp. 68-71; Barry Hallen, *A Short History of African Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 19-59.
  11. Godwin Sogolo, op. cit., pp.2-3.
  12. Olusegun Oladipo, *The Idea of African Philosophy: A Critical Study of the Major Orientations in Contemporary African Philosophy* (Ibadan: Molecular Publishers 1992), p. 47.
  13. Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1980), p. 32., see also Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004).
  14. Ibid., p.49.
  15. C. S. Momoh, "African Philosophy Does it Exist?" in *Diogenes* Vol. 130(1985), p. 14
  16. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific*

2. *Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outlines of an anarchistic theory of knowledge* (London: Humanities Press, 1975); Mary Hesse, *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).
17. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.3.
18. Ibid., p. 188; See also his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1981); *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1989).
19. Richard Rorty (1980) *op. cit.*, p. 174: See also Robert Kraut, "Varieties of Pragmatism" in *Mind* Vol. 99, No. 394 April (1990), pp. 156-169.
20. Tibor Machan, "Indefatigable Alchemist: Richard Rorty's Radical Pragmatism" in *The American Scholar* Summer (1996), p. 423.
21. Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers*, Vol. I (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1991), p.23; "Essays on Heidegger and Others", *Philosophical Papers* Vol.2, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1991).

ON THE CULTURAL BASIS OF  
TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Introduction**

The concepts of science and technology are closely related. In some instances at least, technology could be understood as the direct application of science. That is, science is an abstract concept while technology is the practical manifestation of that concept. Today, science is seen as a massive and complex system of human activities. Quite often, people do not make a distinction between science and technology. The implication of this is that, there is the possibility that beliefs about the nature of science have been automatically transferred to technology without bothering about their appropriateness.

It is important to mention that there is no deliberate attempt to define technology or distinguish it from science in this paper. Thus, if we use science to mean technology or vice versa, it is deliberate. Our purpose is to evaluate the impact of technology on the happiness of mankind. Hence, our thesis is that technology, outside the culture of the people, cannot generate sustainable development.

**The Goal of Technology**

It is no exaggeration (at all) to state that there has been no phenomenon in the contemporary world that has attracted

so much attention within the realm of physical or material development than technology. It is very important to pay serious attention to the fundamental reason for the emergence of technology. An excursion into the trends of scientific and technological development reveals to us that technology springs from wonder and works towards the abolition of wonder so well, by and large, that no room is left for us to wonder at things as they are. The development of technological enterprise in antiquity was relatively unconcerned about the supernatural world and the eternal destiny of the soul. Rather, it was significantly interested in a happy, adequate and efficient life on earth. This is succinct in Barnes when he declares that: *science was designed to teach man how to live successfully rather than how to die with the assurance of ultimate salvation* (Barnes, 1965:558).

What is being emphasized is that technology or science should guarantee sustainable development, which may eventually make a happy world. This becomes more explicit when Barnes stated further that "Francis Bacon believes that science would revolutionize the world and greatly increase human happiness" (p.669). Hence, the fundamental goal of technology is to promote and probably increase human happiness.

In a complementary manner, it is not an overemphasis to state that nothing in the world can be rated higher than happiness in our lives. In the opinion of Aristotle, happiness is the good, that to which all other things tend. We are restating here that all human activities and inventions are tended towards happiness. With reference to Aristotle, Russell writes: the good, we are told, is happiness, which is

an activity of the soul (1979:185).

This activity of the soul (happiness) is in compliance with *arête* (virtue) because it is impossible to attain happiness in the absence of virtue. The implication of this is that happiness and virtue are inseparable. Accordingly, for any technology to be meaningful, it must create or promote happiness. Happiness as the highest good, as known to us, gives birth to a curative paradise, a place of peace and harmony.

### The Achievements of Technology

The following questions readily come to mind if we are considering technology and human happiness: has technology succeeded in increasing and promoting the happiness of mankind? Or, is it the case, that man would have been happier without the emergence of technology? How easy has everything become for us with the emergence of science and technology? With the emergence of scientific technology, we seem to have so much at our finger tips - credit cards, money-mover machines, fast food restaurants, communication networks, medical and healthcare deliveries, computer discovery, etc. All these have made it possible for us to fulfill our whims almost instantaneously. Yet, despite all these conveniences, we still feel along with J. J. Rousseau that in ignorance man is happier; but with the emergence of technology, virtuous men have disappeared. In favour of this opinion that man could be happier in the pre-modern technological era, is that inspite of the assumption that originally, men lived like animals, . without external authority, guided only by instincts, they were, however, free from the greed, avarice

and unnatural immorality of modern technology.

Further still, in the face of technology, human beings have become robots, strictly programmed. We sell ourselves for certificates and the seeds of our dreams grow into jungles of distrust. The reason for this new spirit is simple: technology has extensively advanced the material well-being of man, but the question of his dignity, his relationships, and his destiny is another thing ... Technology production generally has tended all along to elevate and emphasize only the material aspect of human life to the neglect of the other aspects, the spiritual which is higher and superior (Nwoko, 1992: 111-112).

Corroborating this, technology constitutes the prison of everyday life. The emergence of technology has resulted in the inventions of nuclear weapons which can wipe out the whole world. This point is presented clearly in these words:

*...technology development puts artificial weapon in our hand-from the sticks and stone of pre-human ancestors, through the arrows and swords of history, to the bullet and bomb of today* (Stevenson, 1974:113).

The good point to be made from the above is that, the emergence of technology, the equilibrium between killing, potential and inhibitions are upset. Consequently, technology is an explanation for "how it is that human beings are the only animals to indulge in mass slaughter of their own species" (Ibid).

To further support the above claim, we can say that, there is a

neurotic history in every technological invention - a tortured and murdered hope. For example, with the invention of chemical weapons, we have a war, or some hanging threat of violence. This is strongly evident in communal and international skirmishes happening around the world today. Technology, that slave-master, stands with his whip, on human existence, ready to interrupt our happiness. Even when it seems that technology creates and promotes happiness, man stands to be the loser at the end. The reason for this is simple: technological development are loaded with their own emptiness. What we are saying here is that, the sun of technology, when it shines, is blinded by its own illumination. The truth of the matter is that we seem to be pledged as preys with predators, as prisoners of technology.

### **The Cultural basis of technological Development**

The concept of development has been elastically used. Therefore, it defies a universally acceptable definition. However, Evandro Agazzi analyses the characteristic or nature of development as follows:

*... When we speak of development in the current socio-economical and political sense nowadays, we refer to a process which concern large human communities, which can and must be promoted by human initiative, which must lead to an improvement of human life condition (Aggazi, 1993:2).*

What we can deduce from this analysis is that development must be brought about by man and for the happiness of man. It is worthy of note, that technological development presupposes a spiritual ideology that will inculcate the

spirit of hardwork, patience, persistence, etc. This is because to measure development in terms of economic indices (per capita income) and industrialization, is to express a sharp reduction of the horizon of values in the appreciation of man's life. After all, wealth should be seen as a means, not an end in itself. Further still, it becomes very clear if we realize that economic development, technological advancement and political democracy do not necessarily bring peace and progress, development and happiness.

Therefore, promoting the development of a country will mean helping its people to attain the highest possible realization of material, spiritual, social, political well-being which may conform to the specificity of its historical heritage, of its traditions, customs, beliefs and value. (*ibid.* p.30).

In the latter part of the analysis, it is explicitly implied that the basis of development is the culture of the people. There is no doubt about it: the fundamental objects of culture are science, art and technology. Thus, when we speak of technological development, we are speaking of the culture, the totality of the existence of a people. It follows from the above, that, since we do not and cannot have a universal culture, then it is impossible to have a universal technology. Therefore, it is a sheer waste of time for Africa to look up to the West for technological development, since African culture is significantly different from that of the West. According to Odera Oruka,

*All countries will have to detect the degree of their development or under-development by finding out to what degree of social freedoms depend on the extent to which the economic and socio-cultural needs of a people are satisfied. (Oruka, 1993:129).*

In the African context, we know that the African is clearly trapped in the "prison" of cultural life and habits. This is as a result of infection with the western culture due to colonialism. Before the eve of colonialism, Africa was already developed but having been colonized she was raped of her identity. The African now becomes black skin, white mask. His destiny is to become 'white' in everything in science, in art, in technology (i.e. in culture).

But paradoxically, Africa has a chequered history in the technological status of the globe. What makes her case most pitiable is that Africa was one of the pioneers of technology. The third world countries (China, Egypt, Greece, etc) that have been the cradle of science and technology have now been reverted to the position of back-benchers.

However, to change the bad situation, Africa should protect its cultural heritage, provide efficient leadership, and push forward into the future. Importationism, copycatism, technologism, and transferism should be drastically reduced in Africa's technological pursuits. Thus in order to reawaken and rejuvenate the process of development in Africa, the philosophy of **self-reliance** should be a guide. Moreover, since it is a fact that not all technological advances are wholly positive in effect, Africa should pursue technology with caution. Eboh carefully observes that "our problems, be they in moral, economic, political and technological fields, arise out of some prejudice and bias of the mind and until our minds are liberated from these prejudices and biases, true development remains a mirage to us ..." (Eboh, 1980:20).

In a complementary manner, Evandro Agazzi explains that:

*The concept of development, applied to human beings, reveals a moral connotation much more than a material one, both in the sense that moral reasons must be those which push the promotion of this development, and in the sense that the promotion of human dignity must remain its most fundamental goal, even in those cases in which it may be more "urgent" to subserve to more elementary material needs (Agazzi, op.cit:3).*

The implication of this is that it is only for practical reasons that many may concede that the United States of America is nearest to economic and political development. But, if attention is paid to the areas of race, culture and sex, the United States of America is one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

We are reminded by philosophy about the supreme utility of those things which do not deal with means, but with ends. For men do not live only by bread, vitamins and technological discoveries. They live by values and realities which sustain the life of the spirit and which make them aware not of such means at the service of their life but of the very reasons for living and suffering and hoping (Maritain, 1961:6-7).

The scientist or technologist desperately needs the service of philosophy, especially in this twenty-first century. In agreement with Teilhard de Chardin, the twenty-first

century man is the saddest creature. His worth, his dignity, his priorities, his culture, and general life-orientation are noticeably changing with all the modern revolutions in scientific and technological development which fails to have its base in the cultural system of the people. Such a technology is a technology of murder. It remains goal-less and its course is like a ship without a helmsman.

Therefore, technological development outside the culture of a people makes man to stand on trembling feet that bear false witness of his prodigal past. Technology, without cultural foundation cannot promote sustainable development and human happiness.

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Evaluation and Can It Justify? We must then ask: does it? (1994) *Philosophical Forum* 25(1): 1-16. The answer is no. Not only do vegetarians, but willients, too, do not lack spiritual disciplines, wisdom and technological discoveries. They also have families which sustain the life of the spirit and which make them aware not only of their physical needs but of their spiritual needs. The result is that they are happy people living ordinary lives (1991: 6-7).

The action of orthodoxy, however, does the service of philosophy, especially that of the twenty-first century. In agreement with Bertrand de Chardin, the twenty-first

## **THE AFRICAN ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY**

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### **Introduction**

Christian philosophy is the philosophy of Christian thinkers who philosophized within the context of the Christian faith. As Etienne Gilson has pointed out, Christian philosophy is not so much a system of thought as a way of philosophizing, because there are variety of systems in Christian philosophy. It is a way of philosophizing which, while making vigorous use of logic and reasoning in its search for truth, takes account of Christian world view. The academic world has been enriched by Christian philosophy for almost two thousand years, the legacy of great Christian thinkers down the ages. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, etc., are familiar to the average Western scholar and are held in high regard.

Christian philosophy is part of Christian culture within which Western civilization was nurtured. For it is a matter of

common knowledge that Western civilization, its philosophy, its politics, its religion, its morality etc., developed within the framework of Christian culture. Christian philosophy dominated the whole of Europe from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the Roman Empire, through Emperor Constantine, accepted Christianity as its official religion, up to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was the Renaissance that marked the end of the dominance of this philosophy in Europe, but it by no means, marked the end of the existence of the philosophy itself. For it has survived to our own day.

Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Federick Copleston, Etienne Gilson, are well known contemporary Christian philosophers. When Descartes claimed to have broken with Medieval (Christian) philosophy and to have started philosophy afresh, to inaugurate modern philosophy, little did he know that even the very concepts and terminologies he used betrayed him, reflecting the Christian (Scholastic) philosophy in which he was educated, which he claimed to have done away with. And so Christian philosophy survived into modern and contemporary periods, especially in the form of scholastic philosophy and Neo-Thomism. Today, Christian philosophy is still very much alive, after almost two thousand years. But how did it all begin, and where did it begin? It did not begin in Jerusalem, not in Athens, nor did it

begin in Rome, but in Africa and by Africans, especially Clement of Alexandria, Origen and St. Augustine.

### **North Africa: The Cradle of Christian Philosophy**

In the first four centuries of the Christian era, North Africa was part of the Roman Empire and very strongly, Christian. It had famous centers of learning and produced eminent scholars, philosophers and theologians, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Lactantius, and St. Augustine. Alexandria in Egypt had a famous school of philosophy and theology. Etienne Gilson, the historian of philosophy tells us that beginning with Tertullian (i.e. 160 A.D.) "up to the time of Augustine, practically all the great names in the history of Christian literature will be Africans. During the same period, Rome herself will produce little or nothing".

### **The Great Controversy**

In the second century A.D., as the influence of the neoplatonic philosophy was beginning to find its way into Christianity, a great controversy arose. The contact of neoplatonic philosophy with Christianity sparked off a heated debate. What has Christianity to do with philosophy? The Lord Jesus has brought the fullness of truth and the highest wisdom, what further need of philosophy does Christianity

have? What other truth can Christians still be looking for after accepting the truth brought by Jesus Christ? Once a person has become a Christian, why does he still need to study philosophy? What good can philosophy do to the Christian faith?

Thus, some Christian scholars were vehemently opposed to the study of philosophy, while others saw the need for Christians to still study philosophy. While the former saw philosophy as pernicious to the Christian faith because, they alleged, it leads to heresies and encourages heresies. Tertullian declared that Christianity had nothing to do with philosophy. "What, indeed, has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"<sup>1</sup> "Away then, with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Platonic and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel".<sup>2</sup> Tertullian described philosophy as "the wisdom of the world" which encourages heresy. Therefore Christianity should have nothing to do with it.

Justine, another eminent scholar and father of the church, had a different view. He had been a philosopher before he became converted to Christianity, and he saw no opposition, no incompatibility between philosophy and Christianity. For

him, the "Logos" is the divine reason and the principle of rationality. Every man participates in it. Therefore, every man has a certain fragment and we see these fragments in various philosophical systems. It was Jesus Christ who eventually revealed the whole truth, for he is the "Logos" incarnate. Thus, while philosophers brought us fragments of truth, Jesus brought the truth in its totality. Therefore the relationship between philosophy and Christianity is not that of opposition, but that of parts to the whole. It was the Logos that enabled Socrates to know the truth, but he was killed by evil men who did not want to know the truth. When the Logos itself became man, to teach men the truth, wicked men also killed him.

Although Justine, in a way, reconciled philosophy with Christianity and removed the opposition which Tertullian had introduced between the two, he however, did not go ahead to construct a Christian philosophy.

### **Clement of Alexandria**

It was Clement of Alexandria (150-25 A.D.) who made the first attempt to construct a Christian philosophy, thus giving us the first example of a Christian philosophy. He studied in the school of Alexandria and eventually became its Rector. Philosophy, according to him, helps man attain truth and

prepares one's mind to receive the full truth brought by Christ who is the Logos himself who became man. "Philosophy is a cause which concurs and operates in the apprehension of truth, which is the object of philosophical research".<sup>4</sup> Thus the object of philosophical research is truth, and all truth comes from the Logos. The search for it prepares one to receive it in full. Hence philosophy prepares the mind for the revelation (the full truth) brought to mankind by Jesus. There is therefore no opposition, no conflict between philosophy and Christianity.

Philosophy however remains a partial expression of truth and is incapable of giving salvation, whereas the Christian doctrine represents the full expression of the complete truth and gives salvation.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the Christian doctrine is superior to philosophy as faith is superior to reason.

Does the Christian need philosophy? In other words, is there any need for the Christian to study philosophy? Tertullian's answer to this question is clearly in the negative while Clement answers in the positive. Tertullian says categorically, that a Christian does not need philosophy. "What is the use of a candle light when we have the light of the sun?", he asked. Besides, philosophy encourages heresy. Clement was however positive.

Philosophy, in his view, helps one to understand the Christian doctrine better and thereby deepens one's faith. Even if one's faith is put to test by philosophy it thereby helps one to purify and deepen it.

*The people are terrorized by Hellenic philosophy, as a baby is by marks, in the fear of being misguided. But if their faith is such that it can be shaken by reasoning, then it is better that it be shaken and that they abandon the truth ... How can somebody be a good money-change when he cannot tell the true money from the false.<sup>6</sup>*

Philosophy thereby helps to strengthen one's faith even when it shakes it. It makes it stronger. In fact, philosophy renders useful service to faith: first, it prepares the mind of the non-believer for faith, and it is very useful for presenting the Christian faith to the learned people. Second, it is used for defending the Christian faith against heretics and pagans. Third, it is used for clarifying Christian faith with a view to understanding it better and strengthening it. We can see that Clement assigns to philosophy the role of being a help tool to theology. Here, we can find the source of the medieval scholastic dictum that philosophy is the handmaid of theology (*philosophia est ancillia theologiae*).

In one's search for truth, philosophy helps at the initial stage, but if one proceeds further, one enters a higher stage, the stage of faith or the theology stage. Even at this stage, one does not abandon philosophy, for it is still helpful, still useful in acquiring a deeper and more "scientific" understanding of truth. It "purifies the soul of sensible impression, re-awakens its fire, so that one day, the soul will be able to penetrate truth". Thus, philosophy purifies the soul, and prepare the mind. Faith is impossible without study. To accept the correct ideas and reject the erroneous ones is a matter of simple faith, but of faith exercised in science". Even at the higher stage of faith, philosophy helps one to distinguish true doctrine of faith from false ones. Truth, Clement says, has "a speculative aspect and a practical aspect".

Just as the cyclical studies are useful for the acquisition of philosophy, which is their master, so does philosophy aid in the acquisition of wisdom. Philosophy is a way to wisdom, and wisdom is a science of human and divine things and their causes. Therefore, wisdom is the master of preliminary studies. Indeed, philosophy effects a control of the tongue, the stomach and the lower abdomen; but if it is practiced for the glory of God, ... then it becomes even more noble. Clement is here saying of philosophy, as a handmaid of theology (as the scholastic later puts it). Clement was thus,

the first Christian scholar to boldly tackle the problem that confronted the early Christian philosophers and to resolve it in a positive way. Is philosophy compatible with Christianity? Can a Christian continue to study philosophy without doing harm to his faith? What about philosophers who have become converted to Christianity. Can they continue with their philosophy? What is the relationship between reason and faith? Are they incompatible? Can reason help faith or does it always destroy it?

These questions were crucial in the days of Clement and are still very relevant today. Clement tackled them boldly and answered them in a positive way, showing that, far from being incompatible with faith, philosophy is on the contrary, very helpful in understanding and developing it. His solution to this problem became the foundation on which the Catholic Church structures the education of her Priests - a long course (eight or nine years) of study of philosophy and theology, which still obtains even up to our own day. This African philosopher deserves credit for laying such a foundation for Christian philosophy. On the basis of this foundation, philosophy has always been valued, studied, and preserved in the Catholic Church down the ages. It must be pointed out however, that it is not all the Christians or all theologians today that accept this position. Some Christians and Theologians (e.g. Karl Barth) reject

Clement's position and adopt that of Tertullian: "what has Athens to do with Jerusalem? ... What accord can there be between the Academy and the Church?"<sup>19</sup> "Philosophy is but a product of human intelligence; it does not teach the truth".<sup>20</sup>

We should distinguish between philosophy as a rational inquiry and philosophical doctrines or theories. Clement was careful to make this distinction. So, when he advocated philosophy as an aid towards understanding and deepening the Christian faith, he was talking of philosophy as a rational inquiry, not the philosophical doctrines or theories of the Greeks philosophers. In fact, he criticized their conception of God e.g. their polytheism. Water was chosen by Thales of Miletus; air was chosen by his colleague Alexander and by Diogenes of Apollonia. Fire and earth were included among the divinities of Parmenides of Elea; But of these two, only one is a god, according to Hippias of Metapontus and Heraclitus of Ephesus. Regarding Empedocles of Akaga, he supported plurality in his list of divinities.

### The Nature of God

While the Greek philosophy postulated the eternity of matter, Clement was the first philosopher to teach the doctrine of "Creations ex nihilo" which later became one of

the cordial doctrines of Christian philosophy, namely, that God created all things (including matter) out of nothing. He tells us that "God, who is without origin is the single and complete principle of everything", He is infinite and self-sufficient. "Divinity has no need of anything ... since divinity has everything and gives each thing that has received what it needs. Nor, can divinity be placated with sacrifices, offerings, glory or honours, nor can it be influenced by all these things". God is one, indivisible, infinite and perfect "without dimension and without limits." He is being itself, goodness itself, intelligence itself, etc. His power is efficacious, "at his command all things come into existence. With his simple desire, he produces things. His simple glance is followed by the genesis of things".

The highest product of God's creative power in the universe is man, "for whom he provides every care". He created man with special care, providing his soul with "moderation and wisdom", and "gifted his body with beauty and correct proportion". And as the ultimate cause of all things, God knows all things, including man's thoughts. Regarding divine providence, Clement argues for it in the form of a dilemma, which reminds one of that of Epicurus: Either God cares for all men, or He does not care for any of them. In the first case, we ascertain his infinite providence. In the second

case, he does not care for anyone either because he cannot or because he does not wish to do so. However, these two hypotheses are absurd. Therefore, God takes care of all men.

Clement thus affirms divine providence and criticizes the atomist philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus which rule out purposefulness and divine providence from the world, and presents man with a mechanistic universe where everything happens by mere chance. Clement might as well have included Aristotle in his criticism. For, although Aristotle had a theological view of the universe he categorically denied God's knowledge of the world as well as his care for the world. In fact, divine providence was not part of Greek philosophy because they affirmed his transcendence and denied his immanence, keeping him, as it were, from the world. But unlike the Greeks, Clement clearly affirmed divine providence and argues forcefully for it.

With the concept of "Logos," Clement was able to work out a synthesis between Greek Philosophy and Christianity. Logos, he says, is the source of all truth, the source of philosophical knowledge. Whatever kind of philosophy one is dealing with, contains some fragment of truth, for the sole source of all truth is the Logos.

*All those who have sought truth, be they Greek or Barbarians, have managed to gain a greater or smaller fragment of truth .... Greek and Barbarian philosophy have taken a piece of divine truth ... from the eternal 'Logos'.<sup>17</sup>*

The *Logos*, having become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ has brought the complete truth. The study of the fragments of truth taught by philosophers is useful in understanding the complete truth brought by the *Logos* himself since those fragments came from the same *Logos*, for they are all from the same source.

Speaking about Clement, Battista Mondin says he deserves credit, for having constructed the foundations for a new form of wisdom, called Christian philosophy ... Clement is the creator of this new way of philosophizing, and he has deservedly been given the title of "Father of Christian Philosophy."<sup>18</sup>

### **Origen**

Origen (185 - 253) was a student of Clement in the Alexandrian school. He was the most brilliant student of Clement and became his successor as Rector of the school after the former's death. He continued in the footsteps of his

master and began to build on the foundations of Christian philosophy laid by him. In the raging debate of the time, as to whether a Christian should have anything to do with philosophy, he supported Clement and Christianity. He argued that philosophy was useful both before the coming of Christ and still useful after his coming. It was useful before his coming because it prepared the people's mind to receive the complete truth, which Christ was going to bring.

Now that Christ has come, philosophy is still useful in deepening one's understanding of the truth he brought. In his letter to his student, Gregory Thaumaturge, Origen advised him to "take from the philosophy of the Greeks anything which can serve as a preparation for an introduction to Christianity" with a view to "reinforcing faith with reasoning".<sup>19</sup>

Origen presents God as the principle of all things; that is, the ultimate source of all things, simple (uncomposed), infinite, absolutely transcendent, inscrutable, and incomprehensible to human intelligence. "His nature cannot be understood by the capacities of the human mind, even by the purest and clearest mind. Our intelligence with its efforts cannot conceive God as he is".<sup>20</sup>

Although our intelligence cannot penetrate into God's

essence to know Him as He is, yet, we can know His attributes through his creation. Origen thus makes a distinction between God's nature and his attributes. God is also the source of goodness, and all things in as much as they came from him, were originally good. However, some free creatures made wrong use of their freedom and made themselves evil. "To detach oneself from good is to fall into evil, because evil is the lack of good. Hence when one detaches oneself from good, he approaches evil."<sup>21</sup>

Some rational creatures (the devils) detached themselves completely from good (God) and became completely evil. Others (human beings) detached themselves partially, and also became partially evil. But as long as they remain free, the possibility of their attaching themselves again to good (God) and thereby becoming good again always opens to them. Thus, God is Goodness itself.

Origen argues that the human soul is spiritual; otherwise man would not be capable of comprehending or contemplating invisible realities.

### **Symbolism**

Origen distinguishes between two kinds of symbolism, namely, metaphysical symbolism and Biblical symbolism. The former is a method of arriving at the knowledge of God, and the latter is the method of interpreting the Bible. Origen

was a Platonist who held, with Plato, that this world was a reflection of the real world, which is a supra-sensible world. The things in this world therefore reflect those in the supra-sensible world. This is the basis of his metaphysical symbolism. On the basis of this, Origen argues, the attributes of God can be known through their imperfect reflection in creatures. Such knowledge remains imperfect, of course, since it is based on the imperfect reflection of his attributes in creatures. In this way, although we can never know the nature of God, we can at least have imperfect knowledge of his attributes. That God can be known through his creatures, that man's positive attributes are imperfect reflections or participations of God's attributes, have remained part of Christian philosophy up till now.

### **St. Augustine**

The foundation of Christian philosophy having been laid by Clement, built upon by his student, Origen. Augustine came about two centuries later (354 - 430), and raised it to such a lofty height that it began to command respectability in the intellectual world. The name of St. Augustine is a household word in the academic world. His contribution to the

development of Christian philosophy and theology is well known, beyond any dispute. This African thinker is universally acclaimed to be a rare genius, the greatest father of the Church, and the greatest Christian philosopher and theologian next to St. Paul.

After his conversion, he threw his immense intellect and ingenuity behind Christian philosophy and theology. From the moment Augustine came to the philosophical scene, he began to exercise decisive influence in the course of Christian philosophy and theology from his time, to the middle ages, beyond the middle ages, even to our own days. The great medieval philosophers and theologians made constant reference to him, quoting his authority to back up their arguments, as is evident, for example, from the writing of Aquinas.

Indeed, the authority of this African philosopher was so respected in the middle ages, that it was enough to quote him ("Augustine said...") to an argument, for no one would want to contradict him. There is no attempt to present Augustine's philosophy here, even in a summary form, for, that would be outside the scope of this paper, which is on the origin of Christian philosophy. The aim of this brief remarks on him is to point out the role this African philosopher played in the

development of Christian philosophy. St. Augustine, says Battista Mondin, "is the greatest Christian philosopher of the Patristic period and one of the most brilliant thinkers in history. More than any other Christian thinker, he succeeded in finding a harmonious synthesis between Platonism and Christianity ... His religious philosophy and his theological doctrines exercised a decisive influence on all later developments of Christian thought, particularly throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance."<sup>22</sup> Augustine remains a landmark in the development of Christian philosophy.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper is to show that African is the cradle of Christian philosophy and that the foundation of Christian philosophy was laid by African philosophers. Today, we see Western Missions bringing Christian philosophy and theology into our Seminaries. The impression might be given that Christian philosophy began in the West and is just being introduced to Africa. In fact, this is the impression many people have, especially in the western world.

The fact, however is, as shown in this paper, that it all started in Africa, and is one of the areas in which Africa has made invaluable contribution to civilization. In the face of a stiff opposition to the philosophy by eminent Christian thinkers who saw philosophy as pernicious to the Christian faith,

Clement of Alexandria stood his ground in defense of philosophy and successfully worked out a harmonization of philosophy and the Christian faith, thereby bequeathing to the intellectual world what is now known as Christian philosophy. Hence, this eminent African philosopher deservedly acclaimed as the "father of Christian philosophy", and Africa remains the cradle of Christian philosophy.

#### Note And References

1. Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p.44.
2. Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics*, Translated by P. Holmes, Vol. 15, 9-10, quoted by Gilson, op. cit. P.45.
3. Justine, "Apology" 10, 1-2; 13, 3. See Battis Mondin, *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (Urban University Press, Rome, 1991), p.20.
4. Clement, "Stromata I", Chapter 20. Battis Mondin, *op. cit.*, p.20.
5. Clement, "Stromata, II", Chap 12, No.13, Battis Mondin.
6. Clement, "Stromata, VI", Ch.10, Nos.80-81 ,

- Mondin, p.30
7. *Ibid.*, I, Ch.5, No.29.
  8. *Ibid.*, I, Ch. 6, No.35.
  9. *Ibid.*, I, Ch.9, No.43.
  10. Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics*, 7, op.cit.
  11. Clement himself cited this as an example of the reason given by some Christian scholars in his days for rejecting philosophy.
  12. Clement, *On prescription Against Heretics*, Ch.5,p.144.
  13. *Ibid.*, iv, Ch.25, No. 162.
  14. Clement, "Stromata VII", Ch 3, No. 15.
  15. Clement, *On Prescription Against Heretics*, Ch.4,p.142, Battista Mondin p.46.
  16. *Ibid.*, Ch, No.6.
  17. "Stromata I", Ch. 13, No.17.
  18. Battista Mondin, op. cit., p.58.
  19. Origen, "De Principiis IV", Chapter 1, No1.
  20. *Ibid.*, Ch.I, Nos. 5 & 6.
  21. *Ibid.*, Vol.II, Ch.9, NO.2.
  22. Battista Mondin, *op. cit.*, P.82.