

## BOOK REVIEW

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE</b>
<b>Author:</b>	<b>Gregory Ebalu OGBENIKA</b>
<b>Publisher:</b>	<b>Mindex Publishing Company Limited</b>
<b>Year of Publication:</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>ISBN:</b>	<b>9789788548980</b>
<b>Pagination:</b>	<b>136 pages</b>
<b>Reviewer:</b>	<b>Patrick Sonayon Akotonayon</b>

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Man has been perpetually sentenced to eternal quest for knowledge in the court of nature, waiting to be liberated by the man who is desirous of learning. The insatiability of the mind yearning for revitalization of antiquities, and newness of existing corpus of “episteme” would keep residing on the chariots of improvement until creativity is made manifest and innovation thus become evident. This is exactly what happens in the recycling process of thoughts, ideas and knowledge; the essence of which is not to condemn that which is already done but rather to revisit keenly into the treasury of knowledge in order to make that which is good better, and that which is better, best.

On this, we intend to embark on a humble academic sojourn by venturing into a review of the book “African Philosophy: An Introductory Guide”; a masterpiece of Gregory Ebalu Ogbenika, who is a priest of the Roman Catholic Church; an Associate Professor and Lecturer at the prestigious institution of the Seminary of All Saints, Uhiele, Ekpoma, Edo State. The work is simply divided into 11 chapters, in 136 pages.

The first chapter examines the concept “African Philosophy”, and presents it as a discourse that describes the life experiences of the African people. The author further expresses that the reality of African philosophy as an academic discipline is such that is often

greeted with rebuttals and criticisms, leading to the Great Debate of whether or not there is an African Philosophy in the first place. Be that as it may, the author subscribes to the position of African philosophers such as Placid Tempels and Maurice Makumba who both believe in the existence of African philosophy, since Africans are full-fledged rational beings capable of thinking and engaging in sound reasoning geared towards problem solving as evident in their day to day encounter.

Again, in the second chapter, the author defines a universal superset of knowledge called “philosophy”, and progresses into defining African philosophy which is a subset of the universal discipline. He exposes the different definitions of African philosophy as enunciated by different African philosophers. Very complete among them is the definition rendered by Maurice Makumba who defines African philosophy as “that which is written, propounded or created by a person born of African stock; a philosophy written, propounded or created on the African continent; and thirdly one that deals with African problems and culture.”

In the fifth chapter, the author simplifies the line of thoughts that make up for the discipline of African philosophy by dissecting their contents into periods namely: Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and the Contemporary period. Not only that, he states the distinguishing characteristics peculiar to each of the periods mentioned hitherto. Furthermore, he notes the periodization of African philosophy as spelt out by some notable African philosophers. While some lay claim to the classical, medieval and modern periods, others subscribe to the traditional classification namely the ancient, medieval, modern, and the contemporary which the author himself subscribes to. Irrespective of the various classifications, the summation of both thoughts is that the birth of African philosophy follows a chronological, seasonal and progressive sequence in its gestational period of birth.

Language is the wheel by which thoughts are driven; the vehicle by which concepts are conveyed, and the means by which ideas are communicated and classified. In fact, language is the plate upon which ideas cooked as knowledge are served and eaten. The author in chapter six discusses the problems confronting the universal

acceptance of African philosophy as a rigorous academic discipline, and presents language as one.

He drives home the point on the problem of language using the idea of Godwin Sogolo that “a native speaker of a language and a foreign speaker of that language could use the same words but with different connotations” being ascribed to them. This poses the danger of ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning on words that ordinarily would have one and same meaning. This further raises the question of the most suitable language to communicate the African idea, and the unified channel to express the African thought for the sake of clarity and dissolution of ambiguities.

Going further as we would see in the eight chapter, the author discusses the African concept of the human person. He says that the human person is configurative of two components: the body and soul. As such, the human person as conceived by Africans “does not have a split personality.” Taking a leap from this, the author states convincingly that what makes up a person in the African worldview is the fact that the individual is physically, spiritually and morally fit. This by implication connotes the tripartite conception of the human person as against the dualistic view hinged on body and soul.

The penultimate chapter is pivoted on gender equality. Here, the author examines gender imbalance and its implication on national development. In doing this, he discusses practical issues that bother on gender inequality as evident in many African countries ranging from the relegation of women to the background in policy making, more profoundly in matters of politics and governance; opportunities, and even in education. The author therefore stresses that need to realize that women are rational beings too with potentials embedded in them, and that depriving them the opportunity to put into practice their potentials would connote injustice.

Lastly, the ending chapter hits on the nature of ontology. Here, the ontology bothers on the metaphysical discourses as pertaining to the African thought pattern.

Identifying a problem would be of no importance when solutions to the problems are not proffered. To have discovered that a soul is dead would not be as much meaningful as bringing life to that soul which was realized to be dying or dead. This exactly is what has

been done in the book “African Philosophy: An Introductory Guide”, by identifying the problems as pertaining to African philosophy and going further to attempt solutions to the identified problems.

By its nature, the book is holistic in scope in the sense that it touches almost every facet of issues bothering African people. More surprising is the variety of the thoughts of African philosophers presented and discussed by the author. This, I dare say, is not what one would easily come by in literatures that bother on the philosophy of the African people. Hence, the need to store and preserve our treasury of knowledge by reading the book, having a copy, and also recommending the book to others for intellectual consumption.