

THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND KWASI WIREDU'S PHILOSOPHY AND AN AFRICAN CULTURE

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It is the function of our own and every age to grasp the knowledge which is already existing, to make it our own, and in so doing to develop it still further and to raise it to a higher level. (1)

Discussions of African philosophy, over the role and function it is to play in an African culture, have tended over the past decade or so to centre around the question of the very possibility and intelligibility of a notion of African philosophy. The reasons for this concentration are not hard to find. As Kwasi Wiredu succinctly puts it in the introduction to his **Philosophy and an African Culture** (Cambridge University Press, 1980): "The search for the correct conception of African philosophy is part of the post-colonial African quest for identity." African philosophers have recognised that the political quest for self-determination is inseparable from the broader philosophical and intellectual quest for self-determination. Political liberation and philosophical liberation presuppose one another.

In this discussion I shall try to shed some light on the problems attendant on African philosophers in their attempt to pose the question of African philosophy by examining the merits and demerits of one attempt to look at the question, that of Kwasi Wiredu in his influential and important work, **Philosophy and an African Culture**. Wiredu's book, to my knowledge, was the first full-length study by an African philosopher to address the question of African philosophy in any systematic way. This fact alone establishes its importance and makes it worthy of serious attention. I would argue that its strengths and weaknesses must be the subject of careful scrutiny by African philosophers and others who are engaged in the teaching of philosophy in Africa today.

Wiredu's book is, in effect, not a systematic study of the question of African philosophy, but rather a collection of essays, all but one of which have been published before in various journals. It is divided into three parts, and only the first part strictly lives up to the promise contained in the title of the book. Here the author discusses such topics as "On an African Orientation in Philosophy" and "What Can Philosophy Do for Africa?". In the other two parts of the book Wiredu offers an excellent and balanced discussion of Marxism in the context of an examination of the notion of ideology. Here he tries to show what happens to philosophy when it becomes debased to the form of ideology and propaganda. In the third and final part of the book Wiredu focuses his attention on a central notion in philosophy, that of truth, and he offers a highly contentious theory of truth where truth is to be regarded as "justified opinion". This is a contentious theory because it seems to offer little more than a subjectivist view of truth which is open to intellectual anarchism. If truth is no more than opinion then surely anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's and therefore everyone's is true. Logically it seems to follow that everything is true and nothing is false, and therefore the concept of truth, unless it can somehow on objective grounds distinguish between truth and falsity, has to be abandoned in favour of expressed preferences. Is Wiredu's theory of truth not true but only his opinion? Wiredu offers an intelligent defence of his position that is sensitive to those questions, and, let it be said, he is entitled to his "opinion"!

Throughout the book Wiredu passionately argues for a conception of philosophy that is pluralistic, self-critical, and open-minded, i.e. one which is the very opposite of dogmatism and authoritarianism or unjustified belief and opinion. To a certain extent his attempt is laudable and his criticism of those political ideologists who think that they and they alone have the correct conception of truth (p. 96) which can therefore justifiably be imposed on less enlightened folk is timely, especially when seen in the Ghanaian context in which Wiredu is writing. But it seems to me that as with all pluralistic conceptions of truth, which are very attractive on the surface, there is a fundamental problem with which Wiredu does not deal. This can be briefly stated as follows. The dangers of absolutism and of absolute truth are well known. It leads to the kind of dogmatism and authoritarianism which Wiredu so astutely diagnoses in part two of his book. But what is frequently overlooked

by the liberal abandonment of claims to absolute or universal truth are the dangers and problems that follow from this seemingly tolerant viewpoint. Pluralism, which dissolves truth into a number of perspectives or viewpoints, all possessing equally valid claims to truthful and rightful existence, has no means or criteria for protecting against the coercive imposition of points of view. Thus, philosophical pluralism can lead to an arbitrariness which is even more dangerous and pernicious than the unity implicit in the concept of truth. If we abandon our lofty conception of truth, then we surrender it to whatever is believed or held to be true. The consequences of this for enlightened and rational thinking would be, I think, disastrous. Now Wiredu may respond to this objection by emphasising the distinction he makes between "justified" and "unjustified" opinion. But it does not take a discerning eye to notice that this distinction is only sophistical and that good reasons can always be given for holding any viewpoint or opinion. I shall not labour this point, however, but shall immediately proceed to an examination of Wiredu's conception of African philosophy and of the way in which he understands the role and function of philosophy in the context of an African culture, which is the ostensible theme of the book.

Philosophy and an African Culture is an immensely readable book which is, throughout, a model of clarity. Wiredu's presentation is at all times clear and extremely well-argued, and this aspect of the book will make it particularly attractive to the student of philosophy or the layperson. It is in fact an excellent introduction to philosophy *per se*, regardless of cultural affiliation, but for reasons that will soon become apparent it will be of particular interest to the African student of philosophy, and it will, if it has not done so already, deservedly establish itself as the standard textbook for courses in African philosophy that are taught in African institutions of higher education. I shall proceed in my examination of the book first by offering a presentation of its major arguments and secondly by offering what I hope are some pertinent and constructive criticisms of the book.

The first part of Wiredu's book, the part which concerns us here, is divided into four sections, entitled (1) "Philosophy and an African Culture", (2) "On an African Orientation in Philosophy", (3) "How Not to Compare African Traditional Thought with Western Thought", and (4) "What Can Philosophy Do for Africa?". The main arguments of each essay can be summarised as follows.

(1) In this essay Wiredu establishes an important and crucial point - that the question of **African** philosophy is not an anthropological one. This is an argument which receives extended treatment in the second essay and so I shall leave a discussion of its importance until later. What emerges most clearly from this essay is Wiredu's conception of philosophy and the role he envisages it playing in African culture. Wiredu sees the main role of philosophy as lying in the task of providing the intellectual tools that are necessary for the adjustment from a predominantly traditional society to a modernised one. If mythical thought once served the needs and interests of traditional society, then logical and rigorous scientific thinking must serve those of a modern technological society. Philosophy, therefore, is the intellectual means by which Africans can effect the tremendous changes involved in the transition from their traditional past. Wiredu writes:

Contemporary Africa is in the middle of the transition from a **traditional** to a **modern** society. This process of modernisation entails changes not only in the physical environment but also in the mental outlook of our peoples, manifested both in their explicit beliefs and in their customs and their ordinary daily habits and pursuits. Since the fundamental rationale behind any changes in a world outlook is principally a philosophical matter, it is plain that the philosophical evaluation of our traditional thought is of very considerable relevance to the process of modernisation on our continent. (p. x)

Wiredu argues that traditional societies are afflicted by several key factors which retard the process of modernisation. These factors, which he analyses in the context of his own native culture of Ghana, are anachronism, authoritarianism, and supernaturalism. The first relates to outmoded practices of social and cultural life, the second refers to the lack of autonomy and individuality in traditional societies, and the third, closely related to anachronism, relates to beliefs about the natural world that retard the development of a scientific understanding of the universe and man's place in it. Wiredu contends that the most basic and pervasive

anachronism which afflicts the development of his society is the unanalytical and unscientific attitude of mind. He thus proposes as a remedy that "Our children should be initiated early in life into the discipline of formal and informal logic and into the methodology of rational thinking" (p. 15). Philosophy, when seen in this context, can play an important and vital role in the process of reforming, adapting, and developing traditional culture (p. 16). Wiredu argues that it is not a question of arbitrarily destroying the fabric of traditional social life in the mere hope of something better or of submitting to an irrevocable destiny - modernisation. Rather, he goes on, it is a process of reconstruction where philosophy's duty is one of examining the intellectual foundations of a society's culture (p. 20). Africans, he argues, must subject their culture to a painful but necessary self-criticism in their quest for autonomy in order that they may properly deal with their past and their future.

(2) This essay attempts directly to confront the question: What is **African** philosophy? Wiredu begins by noting that in an African university a department of physics or engineering is unlikely to be asked to teach **African** physics or **African** engineering. Why, therefore, should it be regarded as necessary to establish a tradition of philosophy that is distinctly African in its orientation? The call for a specifically "African" philosophy to be established is a call that comes from a nationalist perspective and is voiced by educationalists, politicians, and governors of universities who regard it as politically sound and imperative that Africans should proudly develop their own unique tradition of thought and produce what P. O. Bondurin has described as "an autochthonous African species of their discipline" (2). Wiredu sees the nationalist case as a just one - "in principle" (p. 28). If there is Anglo-Saxon philosophy, American philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, etc., why should there not be something known as "African" philosophy? But this presupposes the question of what African philosophy is and so throws the African philosopher back onto the problem of defining his/her activity. Wiredu and other African philosophers who have made similar attempts to probe this question are aware of the immense difficulties involved in providing an answer to it. What they have done is, quite rightly, to reject the ethnological approach that has dominated discussion of the question for a good part of this century, and which is typified by a work such as Rev. Father Placide Tempels' **Bantu Philosophy** (3). The great weakness of the

ethnological approach is that it treats the question purely in anthropological terms. That is to say, it attempts to define African philosophy in terms of some alleged collective unconscious of the African psyche or **Weltanschauung**. The results reached by the early ethnographers and anthropologists in their investigations (it is important to note that many of them were clergymen whose interests were primarily religious) (4) were that the African mind was irrational and illogical; in a word, "primitive". The current attempts by African philosophers to define their activity must therefore be seen in terms of their reaction against this ethnocentrism and its implicit racism. It is racist, for example, because no respectable "British" philosopher would attempt to define "British" philosophy by referring to the British national character or psyche and the views of the common man who enjoys a talk and a pint on a Saturday night in an English pub. It is therefore regarded as an insult to Africans to try and attempt to define African philosophy by embarking on explorations into the African bush, tape recorder in hand, to record the philosophical opinions of the "natives". Another African philosopher, Paulin Houtondji, has expressed the point very well as follows:

African philosophy does not lie where we have long been seeking it, in some mysterious corner of our supposedly immutable soul, a collective and unconscious world-view which it is incumbent on us to study and revive, but ... our philosophy consists essentially in the process of analysis itself, in that very discourse through which we have been doggedly attempting to define ourselves - a discourse, therefore, which we must recognise as ideological and which it is now up to us to **liberate**, in the most **political** sense of the word, in order to equip ourselves with a truly theoretical discourse which will be indissolubly philosophical and scientific. (5)

Thus an essential task of the African philosopher is to put to rest once and for all the myth of ethnophilosophy which tries to give the missionary access "to the black man's soul" (6). However, could it not be argued that the call for a uniquely and specifically **African** philosophy by African

philosophers simply reinstates the problem of ethnocentricity? The answer must be No. There are several good reasons for this answer. While clearly recognising the dangers of an overly nationalist attempt to restrict philosophy to country or continent, African philosophers have argued that (a) African philosophy is no more, and no less, than a set of texts produced and written by philosophers who happen to be African, (b) every philosophy must have a tradition as is the case with attempts to establish American philosophy, Chinese philosophy, etc.- (c) philosophy is not definable in terms of the thought-content of the tradition or national origin of thinkers. All ideas that circulate in the world today are the products of a **world**-historical development and have been appropriated and transformed throughout time. Tradition is not something there that exists independently of us and which is hard and fixed for all time; as the quotation from Hegel that opened this essay suggests, it must be taken up, re-formed and used if it is to be a **living** tradition. On this point of ideas not being restricted to national origins Bondurin has astutely noted that "The thoughts of the ancient Greeks belong to the history of Western philosophy, but the ancient Greeks and Britons were mutually ignorant of each other. Caesar described the Britons as barbarians when he first went there" (7). Thus, it can be argued that while caution is needed here, specifically with respect to the nationalist concern, there is a great deal of value in attaching importance to the notion of African philosophy in that it is necessary in the struggle for independence and self-determination in all levels of life. The crucial difference today is that African philosophy is now being written not by missionary anthropologists and ethnographers but by African philosophers and mainly, though not exclusively, **for Africans.** (8)

However, there still remains a major problem facing African philosophers in their attempts to answer the question of what is African philosophy, and this lies in the absence of a written tradition. Unlike his/her Anglo-Saxon, Chinese, or Indian counterparts, the African philosopher has no pre-established written tradition in which to place his/her activity. While on one level this can be debilitating to the advancement of African philosophy, on another level it can be seen as a relatively minor problem. All that needs to be recognised is that African philosophy is a later fruit and that the term "African philosophy" can be usefully applied to define the body of work that African philosophers have been writing

over the past several decades. This should not be taken to mean that the oral tradition of wisdom of African sages, etc. is of no relevance and that the African philosopher should leave the question of its reception to the anthropologist and historian. Thus, Wiredu himself answers the problem by arguing that the term "African philosophy" should be reserved for the results of the enterprise into the contemporary African experience: "African philosophy," he writes, "as distinct from African **traditional world-views**, is the philosophy that is being produced by contemporary African philosophers. It is still in the making" (p. 36). Thus the African philosopher is faced with a twofold task: he/she must on the one hand correct erroneous interpretations of his/her activity and on the other begin to **create** a tradition within which one can fruitfully pursue philosophical discourse and which can make an important contribution to world historical understanding as well as to the development of African culture. P.O. Bondurin has endorsed Wiredu's position on this point and has argued that while African philosophy **may** have some reference to an African context this is not a **necessary** condition for it to be regarded as "African" philosophy. "African philosophy" refers to the philosophical work done by African philosophers. (9)

(3) Wiredu expands on these points in his third essay, "How Not to Compare African Traditional Thought with Western Thought". It is an excellently argued chapter and, in my opinion, one of the most successful of the whole book. Wiredu shows how until recently, and perhaps still in some quarters, African philosophy has been identified with traditional folk-thought, and he succeeds in showing just how illegitimate this approach to the question of African philosophy is. He argues that "instead of seeing the basic non-scientific characteristics of African traditional thought as typifying traditional thought in general, Western anthropologists and others besides have mistakenly tended to take them as defining a particularly African way of thinking, with unfortunate effects" (p. 39) (10). A consequence of this, and one perhaps fatal to the development of mutual understanding amongst the different peoples of the world, is that one arrives at an exaggerated and distorted notion of the differences between Africans and peoples of the West. Wiredu argues that Africa, for its part, must overcome the superstition and conservatism of its former cultural heritage, and that Africans must not pay lip-service, for political or other reasons, to "the spirits of their ancestors under the impression

that in so doing they are demonstrating their faith in African culture" (p. 41). He is sensitive, too, to the immense problems involved in calling for the acceleration of the process technological and intellectual - of modernisation, which relates to the problem of identifying and separating the "backward" aspects of traditional culture from those aspects worth keeping. It is of course a problem that faces all communities and societies, and sometimes I think that Wiredu's argument in favour of modernisation of his continent is couched, against his declarations to the contrary, in terms of some inexorable logic and an unreserved optimism. I shall return to this point in my criticism later on. For his own part, Wiredu argues that the aspects of traditional culture worth keeping and preserving, though obviously in some modified form, are those which relate to morality and the ethical life of Africans. This is an aspect which one wishes Wiredu devoted more space to examining. As it is, questions of social and political philosophy, while he recognises their importance, receive scant attention in his treatment and at the expense of his call for the need for Africans to become logically and rationally minded.

In this essay Wiredu makes several particularly pertinent points: one is that "rational knowledge" is not the preserve of the West and nor is superstition peculiar to the African, and, related to this, "the quest for development should be viewed as a continuing world-historical process in which all peoples, Western and non-Western alike, are engaged" (p. 43). Two, that anyone who wishes to compare African philosophy with its Western counterpart must do so by examining the philosophy that Africans are engaged in producing today. Because of their colonial heritage and lack of an indigenous philosophical tradition, African philosophers have no choice but to conduct their inquiries in relation to the established Western or other traditions. But a proper hermeneutic appreciation of tradition should make one realise that this is not simply a negative condition for the African philosopher in developing his/her activity and identity. Tradition becomes our own by critically engaging in it. There is no reason why African philosophers, just like their Western counterparts, should not produce critical histories of Western philosophy. (11)

(4) In the fourth and final essay of part one of the book Wiredu again takes up the theme he has discussed in the opening essay. His thinking here revolves around the question of

what philosophy can do for Africa. It should already be clear from the foregoing presentation of his book that the answer is unequivocally "a great deal". He argues that the question can only be properly answered by drawing attention to the "revolutionary" condition of modern Africa. Not only is Africa engaged in seeking models of social and political organisation that are suited to changed conditions of cultural life, but also it is engaged in the traumatic process of changing and adapting its traditional culture under the pressure of modernisation, and equally under the pressure of a colonial inheritance. This change in Africa will be in some places and at some times violent and destructive, and painful. It is in this chapter of the book that Wiredu addresses some questions of social and political philosophy and how they can have relevance to the problem of modernisation in Africa. He makes the fundamental point, for example, that "development" does not simply entail the acquisition of modern technology with its associated material benefits; equally important to "development" is "the securing of such conditions as shall permit the self-realisation of men as rational beings" (p. 53). He sees morality, in philosophical terms, as the humanistic pursuit of human well-being, and the ethical problem is how best to reconcile the conditions of the well-being of the individual with those of his/her community (p. 56). He concludes this essay and the first part of the book by arguing that what the African philosopher can do for his/her society is no different from what philosophers in other cultures do for their societies: "The function of philosophy everywhere is to examine the intellectual foundations of our life, using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human well-being". (p. 62)

So far I have focused attention on presenting Wiredu's argument and emphasising its strengths. Its great merit is that it raises the question of African philosophy in a manner that is both lucid and provocative. But what of its weaknesses? I will attempt to argue in this section of the essay that the book's weaknesses stem largely from the model of philosophy that Wiredu uses to support his arguments.

On p. 100 Wiredu defines philosophy as the free quest into the first and fundamental principles of human life. He accepts an epistemological model of philosophy that receives its influence from the tradition of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, in particular the philosophy developed

in the 1920's and 1930's known as logical positivism, whose chief exponent was A. J. Ayer (12). Wiredu regards it as a major strength of logical positivism that it sought a criterion by which one could legitimately distinguish between traditional, pre-scientific thought and modern, scientific thought (pp. 38-9). It found this criterion in what became known as the "verification principle". Logical positivism had a logical and scientific bent which rested on empiricist grounds. Put simply, it argued that the criterion of truth and meaning resides in whether or not propositions are logically meaningful and whether or not they can be empirically verified by reference to experience and observation. It is perhaps ironic that Wiredu should accept logical positivism as a model of philosophy in the context of an African culture that is moving from a traditional, pre-scientific mode of thinking to a modern, scientific one, for it is the positivist approach which has become the subject of widespread criticism amongst philosophers in the West in recent times. It has been argued that the famous criterion for distinguishing meaningful propositions or statements from meaningless ones (science from metaphysics) is quite arbitrary and riddled with unexamined philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowing and truth. How, for example, can the verification principle establish and justify itself as a criterion of truth and meaning without presupposing its own truthfulness and meaningfulness? In other words, how can the verification principle verify itself? This is the problem of circularity which is common to all epistemological models of philosophy and which was the substance of Hegel's critique of Kant. (13)

Moreover, it has been recognised by many philosophers for some time now that the consequences of accepting logical positivism as a model of philosophy are quite disastrous for philosophical inquiry as traditionally conceived. Philosophy becomes a scientific method and whole areas of philosophical inquiry are deemed "meaningless" - areas such as metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy, for example. Logical positivism was in fact responsible for a great deal of the barrenness that characterised much of the philosophy conducted for a large part of this century in British academic institutions, where it was erroneously believed that all philosophical problems were reducible to linguistic and logical matters. Thus, Wiredu's appreciation of logical positivism is fundamentally ahistorical and ignores the role that analytical philosophy has played in the cultural life of Britain;

in particular, one needs to appreciate that this type of "ivory tower" philosophy only served the quietistic and conservative interests of the social and political status quo. Indeed, a theme that currently dominates much discussion of philosophy both in Britain and on the Continent is the **crisis** in which philosophy finds itself, which is seen to reflect a crisis of reason in the West. One tradition of Continental thinkers attributes this crisis to the fact that Western societies are dominated by a very restricted and technocratic model of what reason is, a model which is particularly reflected in scientific logical positivism (14). Logical positivists regarded substantive questions of ethics and politics as no more than subjectivist expressions of taste. For example, they argued that the meaningfulness of ethical propositions simply lies in their emotive content (the doctrine that became known as "emotivism"): to say that "X is right or good" is, according to this argument, to say no more than "I believe X is right or good, therefore you should do so as well." In other words, one expresses no more than one's personal dislikes and preferences and urges others to adopt them. This kind of thinking, however, makes a rational ethics impossible. (15)

One of the weaknesses of Wiredu's argument about the need for Africans to become more logically and rationally minded is that his notion is infuriatingly vague. What kind of conception of reason does he have in mind? Is it simply an instrumentalist conception where one learns how to "think" in terms of means and ends, causes and effects? The great weakness of logical positivism is that it reduces substantive questions about ethical and political life to a technical and instrumentalist conception of rationality that is not only restrictive but dogmatic (as is readily evident in its strict demarcation of "scientific" and "non-scientific" modes of thinking). Could it not be argued, furthermore, that in this argument about the need for Africans to become logical and rational beings, Wiredu is colluding with his erstwhile colonisers in their entrenched beliefs that before the process of modernisation was effected by colonialism Africans were illogical and irrational, and that their culture and customs were founded on little more than superstition and lack of reason?

I think there are serious problems in Wiredu's advocacy of logical positivism as a model of philosophical thinking to help solve the problems of contemporary African culture. It should be noted that the emotivism propounded by analytical

moral philosophers implies that ethics is little more than a species of subjectivism and irrationalism, and it is therefore quite at odds with Wiredu's emphasis on reason and rational inquiry and argument. Logical positivism proposes a highly restricted concept of rationality that is formal, not substantive; factual, not normative. It raises a host of philosophical problems that it is quite unaware of due to the unexamined assumptions on which it rests. It rejects values in favour of facts, for example, but fails to recognise the normative basis of its own reasoning.

Discussion of these problems in twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon philosophy is almost entirely absent from Wiredu's presentation. The difficulties arising from an emphasis on reason unaccompanied by any specific concept of rationality are mentioned only in a footnote on page 44, where Wiredu writes: "I am aware that my insistence on the overriding value of rationality will be found jarring by those Westerners who feel that the claims of rationality have been pushed too far in their countries and that the time is overdue for a return to "Nature" and the exultation in feeling, intuition, and immediacy. No doubt the harsh individualism of Western living might seem to lend support to this point of view. But in my opinion the trouble is due to too little rather than too much rationality in social organisation. This, however, is too large a topic to enter into here." But what is meant by rationality here? Increasing bureaucratic and scientific control of all areas of life? The management of social life by an elite of logical and rational intellectuals? A concern with developing a substantive concept of rationality in the context of contemporary African culture should not be regarded by Wiredu as extraneous or incidental to the African philosopher's aims and ambitions. The crisis of reason prevalent in Western societies today is largely the result of the near total adoption of the model of reason that Wiredu seems to be proposing as the solution to the anachronistic and backward nature of African society. I would repeat, therefore, that Wiredu's central argument on the relation between philosophy and an African culture is ahistorical. It should be noted that this criticism is directed towards **all** ahistorical conceptions of philosophy and not just Wiredu's "African" conception. It strikes me that Wiredu's otherwise admirable attempt to pose the question of African philosophy is marred by a lack of historical appreciation of the nature of Western philosophy.

A second major weakness of his book, in my view, is his failure to relate the advancement of African philosophy to the historical and political life, the struggles for political self-determination, of the African peoples. It is an historical appreciation of one's tradition, I would argue, that enables the philosopher to relate to it in a manner that is critical and fruitful and genuinely liberating. If African philosophers are to advocate the widespread adoption of reason as a central force in the life of their societies and as a way of overcoming what they regard as the anachronisms of African culture, then they need to cultivate an historical awareness of reason and of its relation to the development of Western capitalist societies which recognises the crisis of reason in the West today. If they don't, it seems to me that they are cultivating in their peoples philosophical ignorance and blindness.

The reasons should now be clear as to why the **question** of African philosophy has dominated discussion in this area. This essay has attempted to make a contribution to the question by examining the merits and demerits of one particular approach to the question, an important and influential one. It is clear that what remains to be done on the part of African philosophers and others who are practising philosophy in Africa at the present time is the production and creation of a vibrant African philosophical culture. The question of African philosophy should no longer be regarded as some kind of special problem, or as if there were any doubt (which there was) that Africans were capable of doing philosophy in the first place. There are undoubtedly certain historical reasons for this lacuna which African philosophers have explored in their quest for autonomy. It is apparent that the question of African philosophy is as much an historical and political question as it is a purely philosophical one. In my opinion, it is a weakness of Wiredu's book that it fails to address the question of African philosophy in a way which concretely relates it to the historical and political heritage of modern Africa.

NOTES

1. G.W.F. Hegel, **Lectures on the History of Philosophy**, tr. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), Vol. 1, p. 3.
2. P.O. Bondurin, "The Question of African Philosophy", **Philosophy**, Vol. 56 (April 1981), p. 165.

3. Placide Tempels, **Bantu Philosophy** (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).
4. See Bondurin, **op. cit.**
5. Paulin Houtondji, "On 'African Philosophy'", **Radical Philosophy**, Vol. 35 (Autumn 1983), p. 20. This article is an extract from Houtondji's book **African Philosophy: Myth and Reality** (London: Hutchison, 1983).
6. **ibid.**, p. 22.
7. Bondurin, **op. cit.**, p. 178. Bondurin's phrasing here seems to suggest that Caesar was Greek when we all know of course that he was Roman.
8. Houtondji, **op. cit.**, p. 24, argues that the quest for originality is tied to the desire to show off. In this respect, he says, African philosophers have been guilty of neglecting their own African public in their goal of philosophically satisfying and pleasing their Western educators and peers. "The time has come," he suggests, "to put an end to this scandalous extraversion." Like Wiredu, Houtondji seems to be wanting to promote a scientifically modelled philosophy which I regard as highly problematic. See the second section of the present review for treatment of this point.
9. Bondurin, **op. cit.**, p. 162.
10. By "traditional" thought Wiredu means the pre-scientific understanding of natural phenomena in terms of gods and spirits.
11. I disagree with Wiredu on one point when he writes (p. 49): "The African philosopher cannot, of course, take the sort of cultural pride in the philosophical achievements of Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Marx, or Frege which the Western student of philosophy may permit himself." Wiredu notes racist remarks about the black man made by both Hume and Marx and implies that the African student must therefore be to a certain extent distanced from these thinkers. Wiredu's point presupposes the question of whom one is addressing when one writes philosophy. It is abundantly evident that the Western philosophical tradition has had little

regard for Western women and their philosophical abilities and capacities. Like black men, they too are traditionally portrayed as embodiments of irrationality. It is unlikely that women philosophers in the West will want to celebrate unreservedly the achievements of white male philosophers who have excluded them from philosophical discourse. On this point see Genevieve Lloyd, **The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy** (London: Methuen, 1984). Wiredu's point strikes me as too simplistic and naively so. While being fully cognisant of the struggles for independence on the part of African peoples, let us not forget similar struggles by other, non-African peoples - the proletariat, women, et al. - in the West and elsewhere. The black man has no monopoly over oppression, when one looks at the issue historically.

12. See A.J. Ayer, **Language, Truth, and Logic** (1936). For an account of logical positivism see John Passmore, **One Hundred Years of Philosophy** (London: Duckworth, 1966).
13. On Hegel's critique of Kant see Jurgen Habermas, **Knowledge and Human Interests**, tr. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1968), Ch. 1.
14. As part of this tradition see, for example, Martin Heidegger, **The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays**, tr. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Hans-Georg Gadamer, **Reason in the Age of Science**, tr. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1983); Habermas, *op. cit.*
15. For a brilliant and provocative study of the crisis of reason as it is reflected in moral philosophy see Alasdair MacIntyre, **After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory** (London: Duckworth, 1981).