

### Caribbean Philosophy and Metaphysical Strictures

Sandra McCalla, PhD  
Department of Language, Linguistics and Philosophy  
Faculty of Humanities and Education  
University of the West Indies  
Mona Campus  
Jamaica

#### Abstract

A culture with no evident signs of philosophy is a non-existent one. Thus, it is illogical to argue that the Caribbean is devoid of philosophical thinking and exploration. In an effort to hold meaningful discussions on Caribbean philosophy, it is important to establish what Caribbean philosophy is not. I suggest that Caribbean philosophy is not a pastime. It is not a worthless preoccupation. It is not devoid of values and religious and metaphysical truths. Nor is it a pseudo discourse void of the causal history, metaphysical traditions, and logical intellectual ideologies.

I explore metaphysics as one key area of Caribbean philosophy, by showing its uniqueness in being pragmatic in its approach. This uniqueness probably sets Caribbean metaphysics apart from unmoored abstract textbook metaphysics. The difference in the nature and scope of Caribbean metaphysics do not imply a weakness, as no philosophy is superior to the other in terms of worth and merit. The key ingredient to a metaphysics is its people, so if all metaphysics were the same, all people would be the same. No two people are the same; therefore, the metaphysics of each culture are built on different templates. I show the uniqueness of Caribbean Metaphysics by arguing that, since all cultures are different in many respects, it is absurd to expect a universal metaphysical discourse and ideology. I propose a pragmatic approach to the understanding of the metaphysical traditions in the Caribbean, with specific reference to Jamaica by investigating certain metaphysical socio-cultural practices and ideologies in areas such as religion, sports, and the ontology of life of the Caribbean people.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Culture, Caribbean, Rationality, spiritism, mysticism.

### Introduction

The Jamaican motto, “Out of Many, One People” signifies and puts into focus the population’s multi-racial and multi-cultural roots. The Caribbean region, in general, is diverse in terms of history, culture, customs, and traditions. The earliest evidence of humans in the Caribbean,

...dates to between 5000 and 4000 BCE. This evidence comes from both ends of the islands chain, Trinidad in the southeast and Cuba/Hispaniola in the northwest – and suggests that more than one migration wave may have occurred. The evidence from Trinidad was probably produced by migrant groups from North-Eastern South America, given the similarities between stone artifacts found in both regions. On the other end, some scholars believe that early assemblages from Cuba and Hispaniola resemble those from Central America, especially from the Yucatan Peninsula (Curet, 2011, 56).

Because each Caribbean country has its own experience with early settlers, history, and tradition, and these experiences set each Caribbean country apart from the other, metaphysical explanations will differ within these societies. Hence, while I speak about metaphysics within the region, I am cognizant that those differences play an integral role to the structure and nature of Caribbean Metaphysics. As Reddock notes,

...the Caribbean is a diverse area comprising the Islands of the Caribbean archipelago, the Guianas in South America (Cayenne, Guyana, and Suriname), and Belize in Central America. This region is ethnically diverse due to its tumultuous history of conquest, genocide, slavery, indentured or contract labor, and various migrations, forced and voluntary, over its history (2001, 202).

As the slave trade brought people from several countries to the region, Caribbean populations increased during that time, as many freed slaves remained in the Caribbean. According to Barker,

...people were brought from Africa, dramatically shaping the future ethnic composition of the population. A second important wave of immigration took place in the decades after emancipation, when large numbers of indentured laborers were brought from Asia to alleviate labor shortages on the plantations. Between 1835 and 1917, almost 700,000 workers arrived from British India and another 150,000 came from China, primarily into Trinidad and British Guiana, while approximately 50,000 from the Dutch East Indies (mainly Jarva) settled in Suriname (2011, 34).

Therefore, this region has been a site of constant migration for millennia, —whether it was the movement of Arawak, Taino, or Carib, the forced migration of Africans across the Atlantic, or the many waves of Europeans from England, France, Spain, Denmark, Portugal, Scotland, Ireland, and the Netherlands as well as the Indians and Chinese. Since the Caribbean population is so diverse and persons who came from continents and countries such as Africa, France, and England brought aspects of their cultures, traditions, and languages with them, there is no doubt that discourses on Caribbean philosophy include retention, though some cultural ideologies and traditions were suppressed during slavery (Barker, 2011). Thus, within the Caribbean, there is syncretism or fusion of various religions, cultures, and philosophies, which does not subtract but adds to the richness of the Caribbean, a quality of diversity and global richness of ideas and traditions that encapsulates all aspects of philosophy, including metaphysics.

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy exploring “the most fundamental features of reality” (Hamlyn, 1984, p. 2). These fundamental features of reality will be captured differently for all cultures and societies based on their shared experiences. The nature of metaphysics is hinged on reality and its attributes, as well as the causes and operations of existing things. Therefore, based on the nature of metaphysics, it is unfathomable to imagine a society or culture that is devoid of metaphysical explanations and explorations. I say this while acknowledging the Western vs. the Non-Western philosophical divide where “Eastern/non-Western philosophy is seen as static and not rational and, therefore cannot be divided into the various branches of logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy...” (Nair-Venugopal, 2012, 87). Based on this notion, Caribbean philosophy/metaphysics would be excluded from mainstream/analytic philosophy. Bewaji challenged this view by arguing that Caribbean philosophy is “strong, influential, variegated and rigorous by the highest standard that anyone may require” (2009, 198).

In a quest to capture the core of Caribbean metaphysics, this paper is divided into two major sections. In section one, I delineate why an exploration of Caribbean metaphysics in concrete and theoretical is important in a quest to dispel the myth of its non-existence. This is accomplished by showing that nascent Jamaican intellectual reflections are grounded in a Caribbean metaphysical system based on its history and socio-cultural realities that depict a non-reliance on Western metaphysics for their instantiations. Thus, I argue that a critical engagement is needed to generate a consciousness that embodies and embraces the view that metaphysics exists in different forms and is adapted to fit the realities of each society.

In section two, I explore the pragmatic nature of Caribbean metaphysics. I demonstrate that, since metaphysics hinges on investigating being and ultimate reality, this investigation is useless if metaphysical ideologies in the areas of causality, being, and ontology are not dependent on the pragmatic experiences of the people. Consequently, a pragmatic metaphysical approach is necessary to establish relevance and utility of the metaphysical system that can be ascribed to the people of the Caribbean region.

### Hermeneutics of Caribbean Philosophy

We live in an age in which information is readily available, even in the most rural areas of the world. Yet, metaphysics within the Caribbean region is still viewed in some circles as an obscure distraction that evades our sense of sight and intellectual apprehension. It is for this reason that a hermeneutics of Caribbean metaphysics is needed to eradicate those flawed beliefs. By hermeneutics, I mean freeing the minds of skeptics, by awakening them to the realization that Caribbean philosophy/metaphysics is not a myth and does not need to rely on the tenets of European and other forms of metaphysical analysis and philosophizing to measure its existence and continued survival.

In general, philosophy can be classified as academic and non-academic, practical, and theoretical, and includes several branches of which metaphysics forms a major part. This branch of philosophy is often considered problematic due to the lack of consensus about its subject matter. Within the extant literature that documents these disagreements, “skeptics have questioned the content of Western analytic metaphysics” (Hamlyn, 1984, 1). In the early decades of the 20th century, for example, logical positivists viewed all metaphysical utterances as pseudo or meaningless statements. However, there have been several attempts to revive metaphysics. One of the last attempts was inspired by the work of Saul Kripke in the late 1950s, which led to a sustained revival of analytic metaphysics which has continued to the present (Rosenkrantz & Hoffman, 2011, xiii).

Metaphysics “is often characterized in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it is called . . . the study of the nature of reality. On the other hand, it is said to be a study of our most basic concepts of reality” (Loftson, 2010, 2). According to this definition, metaphysics is seen as both general and specific in that it is concerned with the nature of the entities that are said to exist, as well as the specific properties of these entities. Within the Caribbean context, there are metaphysical systems that seek to investigate existence, being, and reality from the perspective of the Caribbean people. Every society has its grand narratives regarding where it came from, where it is going, and what obstacles it faces. In the same vein, Caribbean metaphysics is a product of a narrative that is unique to its people, especially the majority of imported and enslaved Africans who populated the plantations and the post-plantation societies of the Caribbean. As human beings are similar in basic aspects but different in many respects, metaphysical systems are constructed with this in mind, to reflect the universal similarities while attending to the specific peculiarities of lived experiences and environments.

Philosophical issues, methods, and questions transform as society changes. Hence, in taking Caribbean metaphysics through a hermeneutic interrogation, the lived societal and individual changes and experiences ought to be accounted for, as metaphysics is taken from its obscure existence and given its rightly place reflecting the causal ideologies, personal identities, and concerns of the Caribbean people. In other words, the quest to elucidate Caribbean metaphysics, that is worthwhile and meaningful, must be guided by Caribbean experiences. Philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular, is nothing over and above the theoretical

and axiological reflective engagement of the experiences, traditions, cultures, and social norms of a people, nation, and society by members of society to construct intellectual memories and memorials for themselves, contemporaries, and future generations of fellow human beings domestically and beyond. This includes both written and oral discourses that capture the fundamental nature of reality and existence. Since the written word is not the only form of communication, the richness of Caribbean discourses in various other forms including the performance, sculptural and oral forms have credence and value to the formation of a Caribbean metaphysics. As Reid states,

...history is often associated with the introduction of writing. But the people who lived in the Caribbean before Columbus arrived had a rich and well-rehearsed oral history and left a record of their activities that can be studied using archaeological methods. History is not based only on written records but on all human actions, including those recorded orally and reflected exclusively in the archaeological record (2009, 2).

Since some of what is known as Caribbean philosophy and metaphysics is excavated from its history, it would be illogical and futile to discredit the many formats of its recording and preservation, including in music, sculptures and various genres of oral discourses and exclude them from philosophical interrogation and analysis.

According to Bewaji, “writing is a useful means of documenting philosophy, but not the only means” (2009, 207). Since sceptics who discard Caribbean metaphysics view writing as the sole means of documentation, practicing and recording philosophical reflections, a search for mainstream or academic metaphysics would equate to looking for a non-existent tradition or record. Therefore, because the right channels are not utilized by these sceptics to identify a Caribbean intellectual metaphysical systems and traditions, and a pronouncement of death has been cast on Caribbean metaphysics, it becomes imperative to engage a more imaginative approach in eliciting Caribbean philosophy and metaphysics. Yet, the route to hermeneutics indicated here mandates erasing the myths associated with Caribbean philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics and indeed the philosophical traditions of subaltern societies and cultures. Consequently, my contention rests in the urgency for sceptics to acknowledge the relative nature of metaphysics without bracketing philosophy and isolating it into racist, Eurocentric and disrespectful boxes. Metaphysics (and, by extension, the various other branches of philosophy) has an applied element, and the public should not be expected to appreciate its value without reaching out to the broader audiences and addressing the issues of existence in either a theoretical or a practical way.

For example, the concept of causality can be explained within the Caribbean context in various practical ways, and causal inferences can be drawn from many areas, including beliefs associated with an afterlife and the existence of a soul. Questions related to causality such as “What is the significance of B being caused by A?” and “How can we be certain that A is the cause of B?” are metaphysical questions that have been subjected to cultural scrutiny. As Teffo

and Roux state, “Wiredu, Sogolo and Appiah point out that there is a difference between the Western view of causality which according to them is mechanistic, and the African view which is, in general, more teleologically inclined” (1998, 139). According to this view, cause - effect relations within the African context are linked to a particular goal, good, or purpose. In light of this argument, cause - effect relationships are akin to the goal and good of each culture and society, and these societies do not always share the same goals. Cause and effect are also directly associated with goals, purpose, and function that are not necessarily directly correlated. What this means is that causation is not a dissociated event from the expectations and interests of members of society, and this automatically translates into better appreciation of reality.

Within all societies, including African context, there are also predisposing factors that are not directly explicable in physical and even metaphysical terms, as certain events and occurrences cannot be explained in physical terms only (Teffo & Roux, 1998). This has been further reinforced within the United States of America in recent years in light of Trumpian destabilizing exploitation of human perception and fears of causal implications beyond those which are Humeanly related in the partial understanding of causation.

Since I view Caribbean metaphysics as socio-cultural, the views of Wiredu, Sogolo, and Appiah become relevant in assessing cause - effect relations within the Caribbean context. Within this context, cause - effect relationships are not always physical, as even certain ideas and beliefs related to spirits and apparitions can be attributed to cause - effect relations. For instance, an exploration of these beliefs reveals that Jamaicans attribute causal relations to events and occurrences, as they believe that every event or occurrence has either a natural or supernatural cause. Although the Western conception of causality is similar, the major difference is how these have been treated through projection of non-scientific and non-rational appreciation of reality of other cultures lies in the causes that are linked to supernatural entities, as evident from traditional folklores and tales that are passed down from one generation to the next. The events in post-Trump presidency, which led to the invasion of the capitol on January 6, 2021, were all not unrelated to the ways in which vast numbers of Americans were conditioned to think in relation to the falsehood of a stolen Presidential Elections of November 6, 2020. That there were no relations between the facts and the beliefs, even where some were so outlandish and deriving from the supernatural projections, it was obvious that such cause-effect relationships are not only found in other countries outside of Europe or United States of America.

In Jamaica, several cause-effect relations are linked to the notion of spiritual entities such as ghosts/ duppy /apparition. However, these beliefs differ among certain subcultures that exist within the mainstream culture. For example, within the subculture that exists in the rural community in which I was raised, children are often warned by their parents not to be out on the streets late at night as rolling calves (half-horse, half-human beings) would attack them. These are apparitions and are considered as “the soul of a dead person manifested in human and other forms” (MacEdward, 1961, 207). It is believed that duppies behave very similarly to the living and “live around us, often without our knowing” (MacEdward, 1961, 207). They can take many forms, including that of a deceased person, various animals, or even shadows.



Apparitions are said to exist because of the casual relationship between the life lived by the individual before death (good or bad) and the type of person that individual was at the time of death. Consequently, the life one leads has implications for the lack of peace and rest in the afterlife, as the body roams in the form of a ghost instead of resting. In this sense, causal relationship is likened to a dual existentialist notion of a person in terms of the survival of the soul after death and the freedom and responsibility that each individual has in cultivating a “good” soul.

It is important to interject here that not all Jamaicans believe in the existence of apparitions or supernatural explanations for causal events and occurrences. Just in the same way that not all Americans believe in the recondite QAnon conspiracy theories in the USA, but this does not mean that those who hold those views are not human beings or that they do not feel that their views are valid. For instance, Lloyd McCalla puts this into focus by stating that, “facts have to be separated from beliefs, misconceptions and myths and since scientific research is the key to knowledge, a belief in apparitions cannot form any basis for a cause-effect relationship” (personal communication, December 2, 2021). He strongly believes that scientific research is the key to knowledge, and since the existence of supernatural entities cannot be scientifically tested, these entities are simply myths (McCalla, personal communication, December 2, 2021).

However, based on the accounts of persons who claim to have experienced apparitions as existing entities, these cannot be overlooked as they are important to the explanation of phenomenal consciousness, i.e., what appears to consciousness when one interacts with the world. The fact that such “perceptions” affect their daily lives and the lives of others in society indicate that these must be taken seriously, regardless of whether there are physical causal links between their beliefs and their actions. This understanding can only be derived from a first-person perspective, as it constitutes knowledge of the perceived existing entity that is unique to that individual. It is based on this phenomenological consciousness that supernatural entities remain relevant to the Jamaican causal metaphysical system, since each conscious experience is necessary in documenting the metaphysics of the collective.

Cause-effect relations are also evident in other areas, such as the use of traditional medicinal cures for various illnesses. As Payne-Jackson and Alleyne state, “folk aetiology exemplifies the concept and role of causality in Jamaican’ general world view and states that are lexicalized by words such as ‘sick’ are not perceived independently of the events that cause them. And both the event and the resultant state are expressed in the same form” (2004, 6). While many of the rural patients overtly utilize the biomedical system to treat their illnesses, “they continue to avail themselves, at times overtly, of the folk system, either concurrently or sequentially” (Payne & Alleyne, 2004, 70). This practice speaks to the cause–effect relationship that is attributed to the use of traditional medicine because of the belief that these medicines in the form of certain plants/ herbs such as moringa, fever grass, and cerasee, are more effective than modern prescription medicines in curing certain illnesses (Payne-Jackson & Alleyne, 2004). Thus, the herbs would be seen as the cause of the effect (healing) and Jamaicans are interested in the final cause, which is the outcome or the goal.

However, like the Western conception of causality, there is the problem of regularity as a counterfactual dependence is not always present. For instance, it is not always the case that healing is caused by the traditional medicine although a cause-effect relationship is often implied. In addition, there are irregularities in the belief in supernatural causes. For example, when I was a child, my siblings and I had to pass by several graves to collect water from the nearby spring, and we were often instructed not to point to the graves and if we did, we should “bite our ten fingers” in order to remove any curse caused from pointing at the grave. The cause-effect relationship would result from pointing (cause) to a curse (effect). But if the third element of biting the ten fingers is introduced, the question of irregularity arises as the act of “biting the ten fingers” nullifies the effect (curse).

The metaphysical concepts of fatalism and determinism are also major aspects of the thinking of Jamaicans, as evident in certain proverbs and folklores. For instance, the proverbs “man baan fi jroun kyaahn heng” (which means that humans cannot escape or control their destiny) and “suh it guh” (that is how things go) are steeped in fatalism, as these proverbs depict the notion that, as destiny is predetermined, human beings should accept their fate as events and occurrences that are beyond their control. The foundations of all religions that have aspects of supernaturalism is built on the metaphysics of existence of causative factors that are not amenable to simply physical explanations. Studies have been conducted on even the power of prayers for the sick even at a distance in Western hospitals, to show that causation does not depend on only Humean ideas of constant conjunction or spatio-temporal contiguity.

### **Pragmatic Metaphysics**

Pragmatism is often viewed as non-metaphysical, because of its practicability and utility associated with the experience of a people. I counter this view, arguing instead that a pragmatic approach to metaphysical inquiry is useful, because of the dynamic nature of the world, as well as the cultural and social experiences that ought to form the core of any discipline that is steeped in questions on existence, being, and ontology. I therefore posit that a pragmatic approach to Caribbean metaphysics becomes imperative, since other approaches, especially those with objective scientific underpinnings ignore the importance of metaphysical systems that suit cultural and diverse societal needs, wants, knowledge, and desires. Any simplistic and unnuanced objective approach would isolate the people and their experiences, as it assumes that metaphysical systems are absolute, and are independent of feelings, gender, race, culture, and traditions. Yet, the subject areas of metaphysics concerning spirituality, religion, consciousness, causality, identity, and ontology are never absolute, as these phenomena are dependent on individuals and societies for their instantiation and relevance.

Within the ontology of being, for instance, the nature of existing entities often takes on different connotations depending on relevance and context. In the simple ontological form, if I hit my knuckles on my office table, I will hear a sound. I have no doubt that the table exists. Nonetheless, several metaphysical questions can be raised about its nature, its name, qualities,



and properties, and responses proffered to these questions will differ across cultures. In other words, it can be agreed that a substance exists, but the nature of its existence can only be understood within a cultural context.

Similarly, the content of a Caribbean metaphysical system only becomes meaningful when placed in a cultural context. As Gordon rightly states, “the question of existence, in itself is empty” (1997, 4). The metaphysical explanations and interrogations of the West have failed to acknowledge the importance of culture, which has a direct bearing on the mental and physical realms of a subject. The mental and physical realms of human existence cannot be seen in a vacuum, as racism, colorism, class, and religious affiliations shape this existence, making contextualization necessary. When this is done for the West, then one is able to grasp some of the basic ideas and ideologies which drive development and capitalism in the West. The ontological foundations of Western society cannot be given scientific elucidation, without what Collingwood calls the presuppositions and metaphysical grounds on which they are based.

It is within this contextual framework that Caribbean metaphysical system is interpreted as being pragmatic in nature. I, therefore, propose that the nature and methods of Caribbean metaphysics are attained through a human-dependent inquiry about the world. In other words, rather than accepting the traditional metaphysical system of “first philosophy,” whereby various theoretical fancies are perused and foisted on the society to the point where members of such societies may not recognize what the thinkers were saying, and about whose ideas were being discussed, Caribbean metaphysics explores the ontology of being and other metaphysical subject areas based on pragmatic human perspectives. The world extends beyond that which can be experienced, but the experienced world influenced by society and culture is the only one that is available to consciousness when one interacts with the environment. This approach adds value to Caribbean metaphysics as it captures the essence of metaphysics through the lenses of those engaging in the practice.

Evidence of this process abounds in the ontology of being that is associated with social, political, economic, filial, and religious practices and beliefs within Jamaica and by extension the wider Caribbean. Some of these cultural and religious ideas and ideologies were brought to the Caribbean by enslaved Africans. Many of these have survived in some of their purest forms while others were creatively fashioned into various forms and variations of the Christian beliefs which subjugated the enslaved imagination of the people over 400 years of plantocracy – including even Rastafari and its being enamored with the metaphors of Babylon and Zion. For example, Santeria is an Afro-Caribbean religion based on Yoruba beliefs and traditions “with some Roman Catholic elements added” (Bascom, 1951, 490). Other religions practiced in the Caribbean include, but are not limited to, Rastafarianism, Revivalism, Spiritual Baptists, and Kumina.

These religions form a major part of Caribbean metaphysics, generating deep meaning in areas of consciousness, the preservation of the soul, spirit, life, and death in the present and life after death. Their influences are also evident in various forms of religions practiced across the different regions of the Caribbean. Rastafarianism, for instance, is a religion that “arose from, on

the one hand, a decisive rejection of the hegemonic and homogenizing British imperial culture that dominated Jamaica's colonial society, and, on the other, a determined effort to fashion an identity that is based on the re-appropriation of an African heritage" (Edmonds, 2012, 1). In this religion, the metaphysical concepts of consciousness and identity form the crux of the movement's beliefs and values.

Rastafarians respond to the metaphysical question of "Who am I?" in a unique way, which signifies a conscious awareness of the self. As Edmonds rightly states, "...by utilizing 'I' to denote Rastafarian consciousness of the self as divine, Rastafari elevates its most socially marginalized adherents to a status that highlights their position next to Jah (God)" (2012, 2). This notion of the self as divine holds great significance for Caribbean metaphysical systems relating to personal identity, as it signifies a group's racial and spiritual upliftment. It places the "I" into a context that cannot be attained from a European or American philosophical perspective. Therefore, talks of consciousness and existence are futile without a being or entity as its bearer. Since only the "I" can truly know, metaphysics is perspectival and pragmatic. This argument speaks to the importance of a metaphysics that suits the needs of the people, as there is no other perspective available to them that makes their living and existence worthwhile. Thus, it is both an insurrectionist and curative device aimed at rejecting the erstwhile hegemonistic destructive Western imperial Christianity, while at the same time healing the soul of the millennia of humiliation and nullification of the African humanity in the Western space.

A pragmatic metaphysical system does not delimit the nature and value of metaphysics by simple rules of logical coherence, but rather adds cultural relevance as derived from the lived realities of the members of society in which it predominates. I, therefore, agree with pragmatic philosophers who rejected traditional metaphysical subject areas. The classical pragmatists, for instance, did not just reject the traditional subject areas of metaphysics, but by grounding their analyses in the concrete conditions of everyday life, they offered genuine alternatives to traditional metaphysics. William James, in particular, "contrasted metaphysical systems (especially rationalist ones) with the world of facts of empiricism, emphasizing the concreteness of those facts" (Pihlstrom, 2007, 3). James and other pragmatists, such as Peirce, were accused of being anti-metaphysical, but since human beings are social by nature, pragmatic and empirical views should form an integral part of metaphysical systems so that practical areas of humanity are considered. Enthroning the real-life experiences as the basis of philosophical deliberations was critical to the project of pragmatism; this was also important to the shifting of the focus away from the abstractions of traditional philosophy to concretizing the human element without compromise or excuse. Peirce claims that, in inquiry,

We must ... be guided by the rule of hope, and consequently we must reject every philosophy or general conception of the universe, which could ever lead to the conclusion that any given general fact is an ultimate one. We must look forward to the explanation, not of all things, but of any given thing whatever. There is no contradiction here, any more than there is in our holding each one of our opinions, while we are ready to admit

that it is probable that not all are true; or any more than there is in saying that any future time will sometime be passed, though there never will be a time when all time is past (1992, 227).

Thus, Pihlstrom proposes a “pragmatist re-articulation of the nature, aims and methods of metaphysics” (2007, 3). Rather than regarding metaphysics as a “first philosophy” and an inquiry into the world independent of human perspectives, pragmatists view metaphysics as an inquiry into categorizations of reality laden with human practices. Still, this does not mean that metaphysics is devoid of meaning and value. As Pihlstrom states in this connection that, “insofar as pragmatic categorizations of reality are practice-laden, they are also, inevitably, value-laden” (2007, 3).

I agree with Pihlstrom that, instead of accusing pragmatists of being anti-metaphysical, we should seek to reinterpret their stance as a way of emphasizing the practice-ladenness of ontological commitments. It is only “within those purposive human practices that objects (or entities falling under any ontological categories) can be identified and reidentified” (Pihlstrom, 2007, 11). Thus, an empiricism contrast is important, given that human beings “categorize the world and its contents in practical ways as opposed to discovering categories that already exists” (Pihlstrom, 2007, 12).

This reinterpretation of pragmatism’s rejection of abstract metaphysics is integral to discussions on Caribbean metaphysics, as metaphysical systems are established through phenomenological perspectival consciousness that accounts for subjective experiences of the world through the experiences of inhabitants. As Pihlstrom rightly states, “metaphysics does not, then, study the world’s ‘own’ categorical structure, but a structure we, through our conceptual and practical activities, impose on the reality we experience and interact with” (2009, 2). Caribbean metaphysics mirrors this scheme where practical activities set the foundation for a coherent metaphysical system.

### **Conclusion**

The Caribbean region has been through periods of Eurocentric oppression, as a foreign culture was superimposed upon it with scant regard being paid to preserving the integrity of Caribbean culture, history, and tradition, and without a clear and accurate understanding of the underlying ontological commitments that grounded them. A culture documents its ideologies in different ways and although the oral culture is seen as unconventional, it holds credibility in societies that are aware of its usefulness. It has been established that Caribbean Metaphysics is evident in both written and oral discourses, and since metaphysics has to be useful to the people, accepting foreign metaphysical ideologies is antithetical to the Caribbean development and stability. Caribbean metaphysics is unique, socio-cultural, and pragmatic, and does not depend on European philosophical ideologies for its substantiation. Like all other kinds of metaphysics, Caribbean metaphysics is developing and changing as humanity evolves and humans expound

---

their ideologies to suit their current situations. We live in a progressive world which requires dynamic, not static metaphysical systems.

### References

- Barker, D. (2011). "Geographies of opportunity, geographies of constraint". In S. Palmie & F. A. Scarano (Eds.), *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples* (pp. 25–38). The University of Chicago Press.
- Bascom, W. R. (1951). "The Yoruba in Cuba". *American Anthropologist*, 53(4), 490–505.
- Bewaji, J. A. (2009). "Philosophy, cultures, and errors of ontogenesis – challenges and Dangers". In F. Ochieng-Odhiambo, R. Burton, & E. Brandon (Eds.), *Conversations in Philosophy: Crossing the Boundaries* (pp. 198–212). Cambridge University Press.
- Curet, L. A. (2011). "The earliest settlers". In S. Palmie & F. A. Scarano (Eds.), *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples* (pp. 53–67). The University of Chicago Press.
- Edmonds, E. B. (2012). *Rastafari: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, L. R. (1997). "Introduction: Black existential philosophy". In L. Gordon (Ed.), *Existence in Black. An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy* (pp. 1–9). Routledge.
- Hamlyn, D. W. (1984). *Metaphysics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Loftson, P. (2010). *Reality fundamental topics in metaphysics* (2nd ed.). University of Ottawa Press.
- MacEdward, L. (1961). "Jamaican Duppy Lore". *The Journal of American Folklore*, 74(293), 2007–2015.
- McCalla, L. (December 2, 2021). Personal communication.
- Nair-Venugopal, S. (2012). *The gaze of the West and framings of the East*. Palgrave Macmillan Press.
- Payne-Jackson, A., & Mervyn, A. (2004). *Jamaican Folk Medicine: A Source of Healing*. University of the West Indies Press.
- Peirce, C. S. (1992). *Writings of Charles Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Vol. 1 1867–1893* (J. W. Kloesel & C. Houser, Eds.). Indiana University Press.
- Pihlstrom, S. (2007). "Metaphysics with a Human face: William James and the Prospects of Pragmatist Metaphysics", Vol. 2. *William James Society*.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26203703> 1-36
- Pihlstrom, S. (2009). *Pragmatic metaphysics: An essay on the ethical grounds of ontology*. Continuum.
- Reddock, R. (2001). "Conceptualizing 'difference' in Caribbean feminist theory." In B. Meeks & F. Lindahl (Eds.), *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader* (pp. 196–209). The University of the West Indies.
- Reid, B. A. *Myths and Realities of Caribbean History*. The University of Alabama Press, 2009.
- Rosenkrantz, G., & Hoffman, J. (2011). *Historical Dictionary of Metaphysics*. Scarecrow Press.

# Caribbean Journal of Philosophy

Vol. 12, No. 2, 2020

---

Teffo, L. J., & Roux, A. P. J. (1998). "Metaphysical thinking in Africa". In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader* (pp. 134–204). Routledge.