African Philosophy in Ethiopia

Ethiopian Philosophical Studies II

with
A Memorial of Claude Sumner

Edited by
Bekele Gutema
Charles C. Verharen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section IV: Philosophy and Religion

Section V: Philosophy and Women

Section VI: Sage Philosophy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IN MEMORY

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
CLAUDE SUMNER SJ's CONTRIBUTION TO
AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

GAIL M. PRESBEY and *GEORGE F. McLEAN*

On 24 June of this year (2012), Professor Claude Sumner S.J., prolific author and scholar of Ethiopian philosophy, folk-tales, proverbs and songs, who taught at Addis Ababa University for almost fifty years, died at age 92 after several years of convalescing at the *Maison des Jésuités* in Saint-Jérôme, and later at Richelieu in Montreal, Québec. He had been a Jesuit for 72 years, belonging to the Eastern Africa Province. He was buried on 30 June after a funeral mass at the Chapel of Notre Dame de Richelieu. Given the extent of his contribution to African philosophy and African Studies in general, I would like to review his achievements and contributions.

Professor Sumner was born on 10 July 1919 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. In the 1930s he attended the Jesuit institution, *Le College Saint-Boniface* in Manitoba. He graduated 1939 with his B.A. from Manitoba University. He went on to collect many degrees: in 1945, an L.Ph., *Le Facultes de Theologie et de Philosophie*, Montreal; in 1949, an M.A. in English Literature, University of Montreal; in 1952, an L.Th., *Les Facultes de Theologie et de Philosophie*, Montreal; and in 1952 a Ph.D, in Linguistics, University of Montreal. In the midst of these studies he taught as a Lecturer in English Literature at Brebeuf College, University of Montreal, from 1945-48. Once he completed his Ph.D., he went to Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia in 1953, where he remained for the rest of his career, retiring in 2001.

He was a devoted and hard-working scholar. A short biography written about him and published in 2002 listed him as having published at the time 33 books and 184 articles. One of his earliest books, published first in Montreal in 1951, with a second edition in Addis Ababa in 1957, was a linguistic study called *Étude expérimentale de l'Amharique Modern / Experimental Study of Modern Amharic* (after the pronounciation of Abraha Francis). Other books in French include *Sagesse éthiopienne / Ethiopian Wisdom*, with Editions Recherches sur les Civilisation, Paris, 1983, as well as *Aux sources ethiopiennes de la philosophie africaine : la philosophie de l'homme* (Kinshasa, Faculté de théologie catholique, 1988). The latter book was also published in English in Stuttgart by F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1986. Not only did he publish in linguistics and philosophy, but he also

published his own poetry as well as theological reflections, in French, with publishers from Montreal. He also helped to spread Ethiopian literature across the African continent, with a book of plays, *La couleur de mon chant : quatre drames éthiopiens, Petros, Le rêve du roi, Le silence des cordes, Oda/ The color of my song, four Ethiopian dramas, Petros, The Dream of the King, The Silence of the strings, Oda* being published in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 1977.

His collection *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (published by Adey in California in 1994, with a five volume set published by Commercial Printing Press in Addis Ababa), filled as it was with texts originally in Ge'ez, translated into English, debunked the stereotypes of Africa as a land without a history of written philosophical texts. Sumner's argument was that these neglected texts had not been appreciated for their philosophical content as well as their originality. These books were his most highly cited works. Imagine the excitement in the world of African Studies, when these texts became available due to Professor Sumner's translations, commentaries and publications. Professor H. Odera Oruka of the University of Nairobi wrote an article entitled "Claude Sumner as an African Philosopher" which highlighted Sumner's many contributions to the field (1997, pp. 155-63). Odera Oruka explained that he first met Professor Sumner at a meeting of the World Congress of Philosophy in Bulgaria in 1973, and was much impressed. Odera Oruka highlights the important conference Professor Sumner hosted in Addis Ababa in 1976, with twenty-five of the leading figures in the field including Paulin Hountondji, Cheikh Anta Diop, Ali Mazrui and E.A. Ruch. Sumner translated the French papers into English, and had all the papers published in a journal, The *African Mind: Journal of African Religion and Philosophy*. He followed up this large conference with another in Addis Ababa ("Twenty Years Later") in 1996, and he hosted the 7th annual International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) conference in Addis Ababa in 2001. Each conference had a theme self-reflective of the growing field of African philosophy. From Odera Oruka's perspective, Sumner's value to the field includes not only his unique contribution to the field through his research and writing, but also his helping develop a community of African scholars. Looking over the extent of Sumner's contributions to the field, Odera Oruka declared enthusiastically, "I can foresee no scholar of Ethiopian philosophy surpassing or ignoring Sumner's contributions in the next one hundred years" (Odera Oruka, 1997:159).

Not one to be unduly influenced by popular movements like Afrocentrism, Professor Sumner explained that his texts are from "historical Abyssinia" and its "Semitized inhabitants," who came from the South-West coast of Arabia, the Yemen, and were colonizers of the west coast of the Red Sea. The Ge'ez texts were derived from Arabic versions of Greek texts. Indeed, the Ethiopian written language, Ge'ez, is a derivation and adaptation of Arabic (1994:3). So if one's project were, like Diop and more recently Onyewuenyi, to find a philosophy that began in Africa from a

Black population, Sumner's collection might be judged insufficient. In fact, Sumner explains that the present population of Ethiopia is a mixed race that inherits much of its features from "periodic migrations of Caucasoid peoples from across the Red Sea and of Negroid peoples from the West" (1994:2). However, the views of Sumner and Diop could possibly be compatible insofar as Diop claimed Egyptians to be black in the "broad" sense of the term which would include mixed race as Sumner calls the Ethiopians. Sumner himself distanced himself from any talk about which race is due which accomplishments, since he held that race is both an unclear and an unimportant category in Ethiopia. While he did not write and edit his collection of classical Ethiopian texts to prove that Blacks could philosophize, he was vested in the argument that there has been philosophy on the continent of Africa.

It may be that Sumner would agree with Ali Mazrui (1987), who emphasizes in his works the close cultural and historic contacts and relationships between Arab and African worlds. Mazrui himself is the descendant of Omani Arabs who settled on the coast of East Africa. Mazrui considers himself an African, and so rejects the definition of African based on race. He advocates instead a continental definition of Africa; indeed he goes one step further to suggest that the arbitrary division of the Horn of Africa from neighboring Asia at the Red Sea and Suez Canal was a European invention. Where else are continents divided by seas, not oceans? After all there was a land connection between the two "continents" before the building of an artificial canal. Professor Sumner also acknowledged the close connections between Ethiopia and the Arab world.

What about the influence of the Christian Church, which began to show itself in Ethiopia early on, becoming the state-sanctioned religion in the fourth century C.E.? Historicists and theologians argue that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, highly influenced by Judaism, has played an integral, nearly defining role in the culture of Ethiopia for over a thousand years. As Kelbessa states, "Ethiopia has received new ideas from outside and creatively assimilated them into the Ethiopian way of life and thought" (1994:448).

Rather than being an "Afrocentrist," we could more readily say that Sumner is a universalist. Sumner himself expressed his disinterest in tracing philosophy's roots from one country to another in his theory of parallelism of proverbs. He stated that proverbial wisdom "is exactly the same all the world over, differing only in the rendering." He cites the proverb "Men are all made of the same paste" to express his view that fundamentally humans are the same, whether they be oriental or occidental, pigmented or white (1995:53). To find common wise sayings in two different civilizations is no proof of borrowing or influence. He argued against Archbishop Trench who tried to prove that the Greek proverbs are the source of proverbs in all other modern European languages. Likewise he argued against Angelo Mizzi who, upon noting that there were parallels

between Oromo (called Galla by Mizzi) proverbs and Biblical proverbs, claimed that the Oromo were actually ancient Syrians (1995:53-6).

Regardless of Sumner's not being able to contribute to a specifically Diopian project of Afrocentricity, his works play a major role in restoring an African country to its rightful place in the history of philosophy. Regarding the important text of Zera Yacob and the Walda Heywat controversy which raged in the 1920's over its authorship, Carlo Conti Rossini claimed that the real author of the text was a XIX century Italian Padre, Giusto d'Urbino.   In 1934 Fugen Mittwoch bolstered such accusations. Then two Ethiopian scholars, Dr. Amsalou Akililu and Ato Alemayyehu Moges, took on the arguments of the challengers, and advanced their arguments for authenticity. Sumner himself has participated conclusively in this debate by carrying out a statistical study which proves the duality of the two authors, Yacob and Heywat, a position denied by the opponents. Sumner was also able to undermine the arguments specifically linking the texts to Giusto d'Urbino through careful study of d'Urbino's correspondence (1994:226).   Confident that he had reinstated the authenticity of the text, Sumner declared that "MODERN PHILOSOPHY, in the sense of a personal rationalistic critical investigation, BEGAN IN ETHIOPIA with Zera Yacob at the same time as in England and France" (1994:227, emphasis in the original).

Even this statement had gathered its critics and skeptics, not this time on the grounds of the supposed forgery of the texts, but rather on the grounds that the comparison between Yacob and Descartes, and the claim that Yacob is a rationalist philosopher, is inaccurate. Kelbessa noted that Messay Kebede, thinking that Sumner had claimed that Yacob was a "scientific rationalist" in the Cartesian sense, set about showing the ways in which Yacob was not Descartes. Messay charged that rationalism must be secular, based on earthly justification. In contrast to Descartes, Yacob was unaware of modern science and its techniques; Yacob's epistemology takes for granted the existence of God and has as the basis of his epistemology the agreement among men and that which leads to peace and love. Therefore Kebede argued that Yaqob's "curtailed attempts" resulted in an "epoch which failed to be a Renaissance" (Kebede, 1988:127, in Kelbessa 1994:446). Wondyifraw added that Descartes' rationalism was due to the achievements of mathematical science and secular ideology, both of which were missing in the cultural and social environment of Zera Yacob. Wondyifraw therefore charged that "the whole trouble of the attempt to find a system of philosophy akin to Western rationalism in the treatise is that it leads to demand from its author a solution to problems which were alien to his mental disposition" (Wondyifraw, 1986:229).

Sumner said in defense from such accusations that Descartes' work as well is influenced by "presuppositions that penetrate deep into Christian faith." (1993:16-17). Kelbessa finds that Sumner protected himself against such attacks in an essay that predates the charges of Kebede and Wonifraw. Sumner in 1978 explains his distinction that while Descartes advocated a

"scientific" rationalism, Yacob is a "religious" rationalist. "In this case, rationalism is the view that recognizes as true only that content of faith which can be made to appeal to reason... It is precisely in this sense of the absolute and exclusive sufficiency of human reason which denies all dogmatic assertion that reason would be unable to establish by its own means and to comprehend adequately that Zera Ya'qob is said to be a rationalist" (Sumner 1978:74, cited in Kelbessa 1994:447). Certainly in the tradition of scholasticism Thomas Aquinas makes a distinction between tenets of religion which can be proved by reason, such as the existence of God, which are therefore philosophical, and on the other hand tenets of religion like the incarnation, which rely on faith. Since Ya'qob does not believe or comment upon the Trinity, the Incarnation, or the Resurrection, Sumner sees him as a rationalist (Sumner 1993:13-14). Regarding this debate, Sumner has made a valiant and convincing attempt to show the world that a rationalist philosopher existed and wrote in the seventeenth century in Ethiopia.

At this point George McLean suggests as helpful extending the horizon by an analogy between Claude Sumner's work in Ethiopia and Matteo Ricci's work in China (Ricci was a Jesuit and one of the founders of the Jesuit mission in China). At first glance they would seem to be simply different. Sumner shied away from outlining a national culture for Ethiopia in favor of tracing its relations both to the rest of Africa to the West and to Arabia and beyond to the East. Ricci by contrast focused on Chinese culture and its contrast to other civilizations especially that of his native West. But on further inspection a deeper level of convergence emerges. Modernity seems marked by a *mathesis universalis* achieved by a process of subjecting all to a universal doubt. By so doing all was bracketed until the one undubitable idea remains and on that basis a reconstructive process can begin. This gave modern philosophy a new level of rigor, but for the heirs of Descartes it came with a severe restriction of the ambit of philosophy to what could be defined in clear and distinct, universal and univocal concepts. The challenge was and is to escape these limitations and be able to take account of philosophy not only as theory but as way of life – the theme not only of the ancient Greeks but of the 2013 World Congress of Philosophy in Athens.

Ricci pointed out a way to do this by studying the culture of China as a wisdom that could take account of all things and harmonize them as an integrated whole. The transcendence which Ricci considered to be lacking in Chinese thought, others would find already present as an inner transcendence, and hence the theme of the 2012 conference of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy in Wuhan: Transcendence and Immanence in Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity.

On this point Sumner working in the Ethiopian texts but for the whole of Africa made his own special contribution. He would not want, as Messay Kebede and Ambaye Wondjifraw challenged him to do, to show that Zera Yacob in his *Hatata* had restricted the range of philosophy in the modern

rationalist mode, for such restriction could be termed "Enlightenment" only by a broad misnomer. Yet he insisted strongly that Yacob carried out his work in terms that were fully rational and available by powers, not of faith and hence of theology, but of human reason and hence of philosophy. This indeed was the insight of Descartes himself in his third meditation, on which he built his fourth and thence his fifth and sixth meditation.

As master builders then Claude Sumner and Matteo Ricci have together managed to keep open this flow of human consciousness and reflection and the cultural traditions of Africa and Asia which these create. Nor did Professor Sumner's contribution to the field of African philosophy end with his work on Zera Yacob. Importantly, he also focused on Walda Heywatt, who, while still in the oral traditions of representing the challenges of his interlocutors and his own response back to them, engages in topics of great importance as to how to live our lives well and with wisdom. Professor Sumner was known for using the techniques of literary analysis, such as putting keywords on index cards and noticing the patterns of their use throughout a text. But as he explained, he used these literary techniques to explore philosophical themes in-depth (Teferra, in Sumner, 1991:75; also Sumner, 1986:48, 62).

Professor Sumner also devoted himself to collecting and analyzing proverbs, songs, and oral literature from Ethiopia. In the 1990s he published a three-volume set on Oromo oral literature, including folktales, proverbs, and songs. He explained that proverbs used "figurative logic," which, while different than conceptual logic (which begins from known concepts or laws and then leads to new concepts or applications of laws), is still a form of reasoning, in which "the human mind passes from the knowledge of a given truth to the knowledge of another truth which it establishes" (1995:393). Figurative reasoning starts with a familiar situation "which has the value of an example." One obtains a new truth when one recognizes the truth of the original example in a new situation. Sumner asserts that this figurative logic of proverbs is indeed reasoning "for there is a passage from a known truth to a disclosed truth" (1995:393). Workineh Kelbessa appreciates the work that Claude Sumner and Kwame Gyekye did in having African proverbs to be taken seriously as part of a philosophical heritage, a position considered as counter to Hountondji's at the time (Kelbessa, 1993:17-20; see also Presbey, 2002).

Professor Sumner wrote many articles for journals such as *Ekklesiastikos Pharos, Abba Salama,* and from Kinshasa – *Revue philosophique de Kinshasa.* He wrote many entries for the *Encyclopedie philosophique universelle.* He translated and edited articles for *The African Mind: A Journal of Religion and Philosophy in Africa.* A bibliography devoted to his works, compiled in 1995, lists over 200 citations of his work by other scholars. He has presented papers and addresses across Africa, in Egypt, Benin, Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Chad, Uganda, Zaire/DRC, and Cameroon, as well as Europe, the United Kingdom, and of course Canada and the United States.

Living in Ethiopia for fifty years as he did brought many challenges. Colleagues remember a time when Marxism was the official philosophy of Ethiopia, and East German philosophy professors were brought in to the university to teach an official version of Marxism as philosophy. Professor Sumner weathered all of these changes, sticking to his research regimen, and giving the students a refreshing philosophical alternative. As Ethiopia had trouble with famine, Professor Sumner donated the proceeds of his book published with Negussay Ayele in 1991 entitled *Books for Life.* Professor Sumner also edited many of the articles that appeared in the *Books for Life* series. He had leadership roles with several foundations including those devoted to health and human rights and the environment. He won awards for his work in Higher Education, and was involved in the Summer International Centre for African Studies in the Netherlands.

According to Fr. Turrenne, another Jesuit from Canada who spent many decades with Sumner in Ethiopia, Professor Sumner, who he likes to call by his Ethiopian name, Gelaudios, was able to spend weekends in Debre Zeit, where he could go for swims in Lake Babogaya and spend many hours reading or writing in his room that overlooked the lake. Fr. Gareau explains that Sumner attended monthly meetings of an Ecumenical Bible seminar that included Ethiopian Orthodox Christians as well as Anglicans, for over 30 years. He often preached the Sunday children's mass at Galilee Center, proving that he knew how to communicate to children as well as university students. Sumner also never forgot his friends in Canada, "Les Amis du Pere Claude," and he returned regularly to lead Ignatian retreats.

In his last few years I would receive annual cards from Professor Sumner, around the Christmas season, where he would report on his activities, which usually involved reading voraciously. He was intellectually active up to his end. Whether we knew him in person, or through his writings, many lives have been affected by him, as a scholar, a poet, a teacher, a friend. His works still exist for us to read and ponder at length.

I thank Frs. Terrence Charlton and Roland Turenne for sharing biographical information with me.

REFERENCES

Mazrui, Ali (1987), *The Africans: A Triple Heritage,* Little and Brown.

Odera Oruka, H. (1997), *Practical Philosophy: In Search of an Ethical Minimum*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

Presbey, Gail (2002), "'Broad' and 'Strict' Distinctions Proposed by Claude Sumner Regarding Ethiopian and Afri-can Philosophy." In Claude Sumner and Samuel Wolde Yohannes, ed. *Perspectives in African Philosophy.* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Printing Press, pp. 76–88.

Ricci, Matteo (1985), *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, trans., I. Lancashire and P. Hu Kuo-chen, A Chinese English Edition, E. Malatesta, ed., Jesuit Primary Sources, St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985.

Sumner, Claude. (1974) *Ethiopian Philosophy, Vol. 1, The Book of the Wise Philosophers*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press.

Sumner, Claude. (1978) "Seminar on African Philosophy, Addis Ababa, 1-3 December 1976." In *Abba Salama*, vol. IX.

Sumner, Claude. (1979) "The First Afro-Asian Philosophy Conference, Cairo 13-16 March 1978: The Rise of Philosophical Thought Within Black Africa." In *Abba Salama* vol. X (1979) pp. 229-244.

Sumner, Claude. (1981) *Ethiopian Philosophy, Volume IV: The Life and Maxims of Skendes*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press

Sumner, Claude. (1986) *The Source of African Philosophy: The Ethiopian Philosophy of Man*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH

Sumner, Claude. (1991) "Problem of an African Philosophy," in *Books For Life*, ed. by Negussay Ayele and Claude Sumner. Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 44-71.

Sumner, Claude (1993), "Independent Personal Thought in Ethiopian Sapiential and Philosophical Literature," in *Journal of African Religion and Philosophy,* vol. 2, no. 2.

Sumner, Claude. (1994) *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*. Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Co. See also the same title published in 1985, Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

Sumner, Claude. (1995) *Oromo Wisdom Literature, Vol. 1: Proverbs, Collection and Analysis.* Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation

Sumner, Claude. (1997) *Oromo Wisdom Literature, Vol. 2: Songs, Collection and Analysis*. Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation

Sumner, Claude. (1997) *Oromo Wisdom Literature, Vol. 3: Folktales, Collection and Analysis*. Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation

Wondyifraw Ambaye (1986). "Classical Ethiopian Philosophy and Traditional Attitude." Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26-29 August.

Workineh Kelbessa (1993), "The African Source of Greek Philosophy," in *Journal of African Religion and Philosophy,* vol. 2, no. 2, 14-23.

Workineh Kelbessa (1994), "Foreign Influence and its Impact on Ethiopian Philosophy," in *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies: Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies,* Michigan State University 5-10 Sept. Vol. 1: Humanities and Human Resources. Harold Marcus, ed. Lawrenceville NJ: Red Sea Press.

INTRODUCTION

BEKELE GUTEMA and *CHARLES C. VERHAREN*

The cooperation between Professor Charles Verharen of the Department of Philosophy of Howard University and Dr. Bekele Gutema of the Department of Philosophy of Addis Ababa University began in 2007. Professor Verharen spent a semester of his sabbatical leave in the Department of Philosophy doing research on Ethiopian philosophy and teaching courses on Eastern philosophy and environmental ethics to the philosophy students. His research led to publications in the *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, the *Journal of Oromo Studies* and *Science and Engineering Ethics*.

In June 2010 Professors Gutema and Verharen organized a conference on African philosophy. They invited participants from the Departments of Philosophy and Social Anthropology and the Faculty of Law of Addis Ababa University. Professor Ezkiel Gebissa of Kettering University in Flint, Michigan was also a participant. That conference enabled the participants to exchange ideas on a wide range of issues on African philosophy. Discussions continued into the evening, resulting in suggestions for the future direction of research in African philosophy.

As in other conferences, the organizers thought of publishing the proceedings. Because of the limited number of conference papers, the editors decided to publish an edited book consisting of both the papers presented in the Conference and other relevant articles on aspects of Ethiopian philosophy. All papers in this volume are refereed.

Today, African philosophy has gone a long way to establish itself as an important area of research and teaching. The debates of the 1970s and 1980s dominated by the questions of the existence of African philosophy have gone for good. Now African philosophy is engaged in teaching and research in new areas.

A critical focus of African philosophy is to develop intercultural philosophy. African philosophy enters a field that was dominated by a monologue for a long period of time. Philosophical discourse from an African perspective brings new ideas into the arena. Interculturality is not a new branch of philosophy. Rather interculturality creates forums for different philosophies to come together and enter into a dialogue or better, "polylogue". Interculturality promotes encounters between philosophies and cultures on the basis of mutual respect and equality.

Such encounters create opportunities for philosophers to develop the store of human wisdom. By replacing monologues with "polylogues", intercultural forums are instruments of mutual enrichment and enlightenment.

Intercultural philosophy must include not only written but also oral sources. A key feature of this volume is to show how African philosophy

has been able to go beyond the assumptions that a philosophical text must be only a written one. Richard Bell in his *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural approach to the Contemporary Issues* has shown that reducing the sources of philosophy leads to an impoverished philosophy. Including not only literature but also orature amplifies the power of philosophy, as Claude Sumner has demonstrated so well in his three volumes on Oromo Wisdom Literature. Samuel Imbo argues that orality itself constitutes a "text" that is embedded in practice: "Systematic analysis and past experiences of the community are telescoped into a 'folk' logic of survival. Right and wrong are important not as abstract concepts but in proportion to which they make an empirical difference …. [I]f the traditions of a culture are wrong, that culture will not survive the sustained onslaught of foreign influences" (1998: 109).

We hope that this volume entitled, *Philosophy in Africa Now: African Philosophy in Ethiopia,* serves as an example of intercultural polylogue. A number of contributions focus on Oromo philosophy. The Oromo have developed a unique culture, as exemplified by the *Gadaa* system, a truly democratic form of government with over three centuries of recorded history. Written sources on Oromo include accounts by early travelers and missionaries. However, a rich anthropological literature has enabled scholars to gain access to what was historically a purely oral culture. A principal aim of this volume is to encourage philosophers to start research on Ethiopian peoples other than the Oromo. Present-day Ethiopia is home to around eighty distinct linguistic groups. True intercultural philosophy must extend its range to the wider populations of Ethiopia.

This book consists of twelve papers divided into six sections. We will give a very brief introduction to the papers. The first section, Philosophy of University Education in Ethiopia, consists of three papers by Charles Verharen, Bekele Gutema and the late Daniel Smith.

C. Verharen's paper, "Philosophy and the Future of African Universities: Ethics and Imagination," argues that universities have an ethical responsibility of supporting the communities that host them. Drawing on W. E. Du Bois' notion of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, he makes the point that one of the important tasks of Ethiopian universities is to be relevant to their supporting communities by trying to solve their problems. What are the problems that Ethiopia's diverse cultural communities face? Ethiopia's universities could be up to their tasks if such questions constitute the foci of their research.

The second article in this section is B. Gutema's, "Some Thoughts on the African University." Tracing the origin of the African University to the time when colonialism was starting to set the African countries free, he questions the purpose behind the establishment of universities at that particular juncture in history. He argues that the African university is an extraverted institution that was meant to serve the purpose of colonialism, rather than the aspirations of the African peoples. This is demonstrated by the curricula, the research topics and the faculty that initially established

these universities. Decades after the establishment of the universities there are still foreign forces that are behind the ideas of reforms of higher education in Africa. He questions the merits of the reform, particularly that knowledge production must be privatized and knowledge must be commoditized.

The last paper in this section by D. Smith, "The Challenge and Responsibility of Universal Otherness in African Philosophy," examines the process of establishing MA/PhD programs of study in philosophy at Addis Ababa University. What is the dialectic of a philosophy program rooted in an Ethiopian context that nevertheless tries to make a unique contribution to philosophy as a universal discipline? Drawing on such figures as Habermas and Foucault, Smith argues that a philosophy program in an African context should be concerned with detaching the power of truth or knowledge from the forms of social, economic and cultural hegemony within which it operates at the present time.

Section two is titled Philosophy and Culture. Here we have the contributions of Messay Kebede, Taddesse Berisso and Charles Verharen.

Messay's paper, "Harnessing myth to Rationality" revisits the old issue of the debate on ethnophilosophy, myth and rationality. Ethnophilosophy is an imaginative movement that attempts to deploy historicity. Kebede argues that myth and rationality need to be seen as complementary. He shows how many European thinkers like Nietzsche used the two in a complementary fashion. Mythical thinking is a moment of knowledge that can be harnessed to rationality.

Taddesse Berisso's "The Riddles of the Number Nine among the *Guji*-Oromo Culture", describes the special place that the number nine has in that culture. By drawing on proverbs, games and the like Berisso shows how the *Guji*-Oromo associate the number nine with critical time, ghosts, illness and death. He discusses the kind of rituals they perform to avoid adversity. He concludes by underlining the importance of the study of numbers for anthropology. Berisso's text illustrates the need for philosophical reflection on the practice of anthropology.

C. Verharen's "Sage Philosophy, Rationality and Science: The Case of Ethiopia" is inspired by Kebede's work, particularly the thesis represented in the essay in this section. Criticizing Kebede for his understanding of the relation between myth and rationality, Verharen argues that myth is in fact the underpinning of rationality. A "myth" in Verharen's sense is in the original Greek sense a "likely story." Because of the highly generalized nature of philosophical discourse, no philosophical hypothesis can be verified. Relying on the research of Kebede, Claude Sumner and Gemetchu Megerssa, Verharen sets a new research agenda that deploys anthropology and sage philosophy to produce what Kebede calls a "galvanizing myth" to confront the dangers of globalization

In the next section Taddesse Lencho's "The Spirit of Rousseau and *Borana* Political Traditions: An Exercise in Understanding" compares the concept of democracy developed by the *Borana* as a collective entity with

Rousseau's concept of democracy. Lencho highlights Rousseau's hypothetical simple societies in which it is possible to practice direct democracy and the *Borana* development of both direct and representative democracy. He argues extensively for the merits of *Borana* Democracy over Rousseau's version. His conclusion addresses the *Boranaa* capacity to preserve its democratic form of government in the face of opposition from colonial powers.

Ezkiel Gebissa's "Encounter of the Oromo with Evangelical Christianity: a Look at the Meaning of Conversion" examines how the *Maccaa* Oromo converted to Christianity. Referring to the various explanations of conversion, he argues that the encounter between the missionaries and the converts happened in the form of a give and take that results in a hybrid. This syncretic fusion takes the form of an intercultural or better still an interreligious encounter, where what emerges out of the encounter incorporates elements of both traditions. In Gebissa's view conversion is not a loss of one's traditional beliefs in the case of the *Maccaa* Oromo of Wallaggaa but a fusion of two traditions.

Gail Presbey's "Should Women Love Wisdom? Evaluating the Ethiopian Wisdom Tradition" draws on Claude Sumner's research on the history of Ethiopian philosophy. Her particular focus is the "*Life and Maxims of Skendes.*" Presbey examines the concept of wisdom as seen from the perspective of women. On the basis of a critical study of Skendes' examination of the assertion that "all women are prostitutes," she shows that wisdom in some versions of traditional Ethiopian philosophy takes an abusive, prejudicial stance towards women. Presbey asks how women are to be "lovers of wisdom" if a culturally defined concept of wisdom is self-destructive to women.

Section six, the last section, consists of three papers. Tenna Dewo's "The Concept of Peace in the Oromo *Gadaa* system: Its Mechanism and Moral Dimension", analyzes the *Gadaa* system in terms of its implicit values and its centrality to the *Borana* community as well as the Oromo at large. The paper explicates the moral principles and values underlying the Oromo concepts of peace (*nagaa*) and morality (*safuu*).

Charles Verharen's "Comparing Oromo and Ancient Egyptian Philosophy" is a comparative study of Oromo and Ancient Egyptian ontological and ethical principles. The Egyptologists Erik Hornung and Ian Assmann are his primary sources of Egyptian thought. Gemetchu Megerssa's magisterial study of the Oromo culture is his primary source for Oromo thought. Verharen's conclusion proposes a holistic philosophy based on *maat* (harmony) in the case of Egypt and *nagaa* (peace) in the case of the Oromo that takes life as an end in itself. Ancient African philosophy proposes an alternative to the world philosophies that have failed to inspire us to live as a global community capable of securing a future for coming generations.

Teodros Kiros' "Moral Economy: An Original Economic form for the African Condition" focuses on the ancient Egyptian concept of *maat's*

potential for resolving the moral crisis of the contemporary African state. The term *maat* is translated as harmony, order, peace, justice, or balance. Kiros describes *maat* as the foundational principle of ancient Egyptian ethics.

In this essay Kiros sets himself the task of outlining how to "create human beings who can act generously, patiently, tolerantly and lovingly. We do not have such human beings in sufficient numbers to construct an economic form that values justice, uprightness, wisdom, tolerance and loving patience." Taking everyday examples to illustrate how *Maatian* ethics guides decision-making, Kiros sets the foundation for an ethical reconfiguration of contemporary African states.

SECTION I

PHILOSOPHY OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
IN ETHIOPIA

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: ETHICS AND IMAGINATION

CHARLES C. VERHAREN

INTRODUCTION

This essay considers the ethical responsibilities of universities whose supporting constituencies are marginalized. With particular reference to African universities, the essay argues that the primary responsibility of a university is to solve the problems of the communities that make the university's existence possible. With special reference to Ethiopian universities, the essay contends that universities responsible for populations with wide ranges of distinctive cultures must center their research programs in those cultural contexts. Commenting on the distinctive nature of historically black colleges and universities in the United States (HBCUs), W.E.B. Du Bois (1975) claimed that all universities are embedded in particular cultural contexts. The Sorbonne is both responsive to and responsible for the French who make its existence possible. HBCUs must address the concerns of African Americans. Ethiopian universities are embedded in the contexts of over 80 diverse cultures, if language is indeed a primary carrier of culture. On Du Bois' model, Ethiopian universities must direct their research towards the solutions of the problems faced by those cultures.

ETHICS AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: SPECIAL ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF UNIVERSITIES WHOSE CONSTITUENCIES ARE MARGINALIZED

Universities are differentiated by the problems of the populations who make the universities' existence possible. Would it be possible to have a research university whose problems were completely isolated from any population whatsoever? A Pure Research University? Of course, if the research of that university were not supported by any population whatsoever.

We could consider this hypothetical model: a Harvard with an endowment so gigantic that it covered all the university's expenses. However, Harvard's endowment covers only a portion of its expenditures. University expenses are supported by endowment, tuition, federal or state funds, private funds, and corporate funds.

If a university followed the intellectual capital model of corporatization of the university, then it might appear to be on a path to private funding sustainability. However, corporations sell products. Consumers buy those products. If there is a profit, then consumers are entitled to a share.

But both corporations and consumers will agree that some profit be devoted to research and development to solve new consumer problems. The buying power of the consumer pays for the R and D. The interest of the consumer then dictates the nature and direction of the R and D. If a university has no need for consumer funding, then the university is liberated from its responsibilities (determined by ethics) to consumers. The same eliminative steps follow for federal, state, and local government funding, as taxpayers are the source.

Again, a pure research university has the ethical right to pick the problems of its own choosing. For-profit universities, like the University of Phoenix in the United States, have no ethical responsibilities to supporting communities since they are self-supporting. Their ethical responsibilities are primarily to their students. However, any other non-profit university, whether private or public, must choose the unsolved problems of its constituting populations as the prime focus of its research.

Those problems dictate the particular mission and execution of the university. And that foundation dictates the nature and extent of its academic programs. The primary responsibility of those academic programs is the survival of the university's constituent populations. An elementary "survival ethics" can assist the triage decisions to be made in prioritizing research programs.

Survival is a function in the simplest sense of air, temperature control, water, food, healthcare, and education. If a university's supporting communities do not have access to these ethical goods, then the first mission of the university must be to make that access possible. If the university's supporting communities have only marginalized access to these goods, then the university's research programs must act toward demarginalization.

The survival checklist enumerates the following kinds of items. Are people suffering? Are they dying? Are the solutions to those urgent problems well known? Then the university's first priority is to make sure those solutions are in the hands of the suffering and dying populations.

If, for example, populations are dying because of lack of access to clean water, then the first research task of biology, chemistry, and chemical engineering departments should be the technical solutions of that problem. The first research task of political science, economics, social work, sociology, and psychology departments should be to discover the collective means for the implementation of those technical solutions.

Are the constituent populations' problems ones of marginalization with reference to other populations? Are those populations not suffering or dying but living at the margins of unethical differences in life outcomes as

dictated by the survival checklist? E.g., the air available to a marginalized population may permit survival, but it may also endanger health in the longer run. The same kinds of consideration hold true for temperature control, clothing and shelter, whether the disparities are marginal or maximal (e.g., the favelas of all the large cities in developing nations, the homeless in the wealthiest cities in the world).

The research mission (and that is its only mission) of a university is a function of its constituent populations' problems. There can be no controversy about pure and applied research here. Pure research gives the most practical solutions to the deepest human problems. $E=mc^2$ gave us the bomb! But the latitude of the constituting populations' problems dictates the urgency of research.

The university's constituents are not its students. Rather those constituents comprise the populations that make the university's existence possible. Students are not customers. They are apprentices. We train them to do what we as faculty do: solve unsolved problems.

Part of the university's mission is to train students to solve the problems of those populations for pay – to train the students in their chosen professions. However, Du Bois (1975) argued that the point is not to train students as professionals so that they may secure well-paid jobs. The point is to solve the problems of the universities' constituents. In the best case, the problems will be solved so well, or the students will be able to pass their problem-solving skills into the communities so well that the need for the students as professional problem-solvers in the communities will disappear.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: A DEFINITION OF PHILOSOPHY IS PROBLEMATIC

The second part of the paper considers the broader role philosophy should play in the future of African universities. Philosophy's most important function is to determine universities' ethical responsibilities. However, philosophy can be most generally defined as a set of rules for the direction of life. These rules follow from what is taken to be most valuable in diverse cultural contexts.

This essay's presupposition is that survival is a primary ethical consideration: to be good is first to be. Discussion of value is pointless if survival cannot be assured. In cultural contexts where survival is at risk, survival takes precedence. However, survival is best assured under conditions of flourishing. Human flourishing on a biological model is a function of the expression of community bonding, rationality, freedom or creativity, pleasure as a motive for action, and meditation as the rational control of the attention.

These ethical assumptions cannot stand alone. To make claims about value is at once to make claims about existence. And beneath these two kinds of claims is a third set of claims about knowledge. The constellation of all these claims leads to a final demarcation of a set of rules for the

direction of life. Ethics is built on a foundation of ontology. Both these subsets of philosophy in turn rest on assumptions about what we can truly know: our epistemologies. These three abstract considerations finalize what is most concrete about philosophy: its praxiologies.

Heidegger (1977) separates western philosophy into four phases: ontology as the prime concern of the Greeks; epistemology as the concern of early modern philosophers like Descartes and Hume; ethics the concern of later modern philosophers like Kant and Hegel; praxiology the concern of 20th century philosophy upon the collapse of the three earlier enterprises. 20th century philosophers must choose among phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism, Marxism, analysis and logical positivism, and pragmatism.

Heidegger's choice in his last essays is at once a regression to his idea of ancient Greek obsession with being and pragmatism – a method for revealing Being and saving humanity from technological self-destruction. Heidegger's final method takes much from Asian philosophy – indeed a critical work accuses him of plagiarism (May 1996). He believes that careful practice of the fine arts can turn us away from technology's concentration on objects as means to ends beyond themselves rather than as ends in themselves.

Richard Rorty (2009a and b), the most important American pragmatist of the late 20th century, finds much to admire in Heidegger's work. However, Rorty's focus is not on the nature of Being or Truth. He believes that the primary mission of intellectuals is to find better ways to live for all the planet's peoples. Freedom and creativity are the hallmarks of a "better life." His only constraint, his "categorical imperative," is that one person's exercise of freedom should not infringe upon another's.

Like Heidegger, Rorty believes that humanity has gone through several phases of intellectual evolution. The first phase is mythology and religion. The second phase is philosophy. When philosophy failed to yield objective answers to its four fundamental questions, science attempted to take over philosophy's role. However, philosophy's questions can never be answered in an objective, definitive way. Philosophy's gravest mistake was to imagine that its objective was a final Truth capable of guiding humans safely through their lives for the duration of human existence.

Rorty in his last essay before his death (2009b) proclaimed that literature must now assume philosophy's historic responsibilities. He believes that literature's exercise of the imagination has been much more forceful in orienting humans toward better ways to live. Shakespeare and Cervantes rather than Descartes and Kant should be our models for re-conceiving the nature of life and better ways to live it. Rorty has little respect for philosophy's traditional use of argument. He believes that an evocative literary image has much more compelling force for behavior change than any form of abstract argumentation.

Rorty is mistaken in thinking that literature can assume philosophy's historic responsibilities. Philosophy and literature as art occupy

indispensable roles in the spectrum of intellectual activities. Art focuses on what is unique, and philosophy on what is universal. To think is to connect experience by means of abstract patterns or concepts. These abstractions confer the power to generalize over experience. Scientific generalizations enable us to predict and thereby control the future. Even more abstract than scientific generalizations, philosophy's universals serve as rules for the direction of life. Because of their extreme generality, philosophical statements can never be verified. They frame experiments in living tested over centuries across the world's cultures.

In writing his last essay, Rorty proposes the substitution of literature for philosophy. He believes that philosophy has lost contact with the people because of a failure of imagination. The primary tool of literature is imagination. Rorty's substitution is in fact just one more instance of philosophy at work. He is giving us yet another rule for the direction of life: stop trying to do philosophy and start trying to exercise the imagination in our endeavor to fashion better ways to live.

Rorty is wrong on this point. As Aristotle says, the disciplines that are the most abstract are also the hardest to practice. Those disciplines are also the most powerful in the long run. So we will always put the most abstract thinkers on a pedestal – Einstein, Christ, Newton, Buddha, Mo-Tzu.

What Rorty fails to recognize is that humans cannot avoid philosophy, no matter how hard they try. As Aldous Huxley points out, the mind is a reducing valve. It compresses the 'buzzin', 'bloomin' 'confusion' of William James' world to ever more abstract concepts. These concepts like love, truth, justice, happiness, become rules, guidelines for the direction of life.

We live by these highly abstract universal guidelines, and we cannot escape that fate. So philosophy can never be finished. However, Rorty's point about imagination's role in transforming life must not be lost.

Like art, indeed like all the intellectual disciplines, philosophy's most important tool is the imagination. As Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited whereas imagination embraces the entire world."

Rorty himself serves as the best example for showing that philosophy as a set of highly generalized rules for the direction of life is simply inescapable. In announcing the triumph of literature over philosophy, he is doing philosophy: Rorty presents us with his take on the rules for the direction not of life in general but of intellectual disciplines. We direct our lives with sets of rules based on highly generalized and ungrounded assumptions. Centuries of experience of successful lives lived according to those rules give us the confidence to carry them into the future. But past success is no guarantee that quite different sets of rules may offer us a much better life.

For this reason, a primary objective of a university as an instrument for solving unsolved problems should be the investigation of cultures that have developed their own sets of rules for the direction of life. As W.E.B.

Du Bois (1975) points out, universities are embedded in the cultures that make their existence possible. Their primary mission should be usefulness in solving the problems faced by those cultures.

Many African universities have an extraordinary advantage over Western-style universities. Addis Ababa University, for example, is embedded in around eighty cultures, if languages can be considered as a primary instrument for cultural transmission. Cultures that have developed their own rules for the direction of life, their own philosophies, can be primary instruments for the stimulation of imagination that Rorty calls for in announcing the passing of philosophy's importance on the world-stage.

Addis Ababa University has the particular advantage of having access to nearly two centuries of social science research on the Oromo cultures, the home cultures of the majority of Ethiopia's population. Of particular interest are the ethical concepts of *saffu,* morality, and *nagaa*, peace or harmony. These concepts serve as the foundation for the complex democratic socio-political system comprised of the national assembly (Gumi), the executive generational organization (Gadaa), and the electoral institution (Qallu). Of particular interest to the University should be the Oromo democratic separation of powers. Members of the electoral unit cannot themselves hold office. Members of the executive unit cannot themselves enact legislation, and they are subject to removal from office by the national assembly (Lencho 2012).

Sage philosophy research on traditional African forms of democracy may serve as stimuli for the reconceptualization of political structures necessary for the unification of Africa – to say nothing of the world. Because of the cultural diversity of Africa, home to some 1500 languages, African universities have an extraordinary advantage in offering ethical and political models for global sustainability and social justice.

REFERENCES

Du Bois, W.E.B. 1975. *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques. 1006-1960.* Ed. Herbert Aptheker. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1977. *Basic Writings.* New York: Harper and Row.

Lencho, Taddese. 2012. The Spirit of Rousseau and Borana Political Traditions: An Exercise in Understanding. In Gutema, B. and C. Verharen (eds.) *African Philosophy Now: African Philosophy in Ethiopia.* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Philosophical Studies.

May, Reinhard. 1996. *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East-Asian Influences on his Work.* London: Routledge.

Rorty, Richard. 2009a. From Religion through Philosophy to Literature: The Way Western Intellectuals Went. http://www.crvp.org/book/Series04/IVA-30/chapter-6.htm, accessed 07/10/10.

_____. 2009b. Philosophy as a Transitional Genre. http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/chapters/0262025671chap1.pdf, accessed 07/10/10.

CHAPTER II

SOME THOUGHTS ON
THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

BEKELE GUTEMA

Knowing the nature and functions of the African university means, looking into its historical origins and purposes. Far from having ancient historical traditions many African universities are just over half a century old. [1] In countries under colonialism like Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya, colonial universities came into being on the eve of independence with faculty from the University of London and similar institutions of higher learning. Boasting long years of independence (except for the years of Italian occupation, 1936-1941) Ethiopia appears to present a somewhat different case. Nevertheless, its first university college, the University College of Addis Ababa and later, Haile Selassie I University and now Addis Ababa University, was not established until 1950.

Why were these universities established at about the same time despite manifold differences in the respective countries' histories? From a superficial perspective, we may say that the importance of the roles universities play in society necessitated the establishment of these universities. Creating and disseminating knowledge is indispensable for national development. Haile Selassie, emperor when Addis Ababa University was established, recurrently talked about the role of higher education in nation building. As noted by Balsvik, "In his inaugural address Emperor Haile Sellassie talked extensively and generally about the moral and spiritual objectives of a university education. Specifically he asserted that it was vital to promote national unity and educate Ethiopians for service to their country" (Balsvik 2005: 23).

Setting aside imperial rhetoric for the moment, it would be appropriate to inquire into the real reasons for the emergence of African universities in situations where they could only be seen as islands of Eurocentrism or modernity in a sea of illiteracy and a predominantly rural life. I do not belittle the importance of education or its institutions in the African context. What I question is whether there was a genuine desire for universities that

---

[1] The Addis Ababa University celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2000. The University of Nairobi began in 1956 as part of the University of London; Makerere began in 1949 under University College, London and the University of Ibadan started in 1948 under the University of London. A more or less similar pattern is to be observed with many of the Universities in the colonized countries

could be vehicles of substantive change in the quality of African lives. Might it have been possible to establish institutions of higher education that were able to stamp out illiteracy and alter rural ways of life hampered by low productivity due to lack of knowledge of modern technology and science? In general were these historical African universities the right solutions to the past and present problems of African societies?

Examining how these institutions started their programs, the personnel that played the leading role in establishing, consolidating and running the universities, the type of knowledge, skills and values instilled in the students will provoke us to question the suitability of these institutions in producing and transferring knowledge appropriate to our African contexts.

Ambrose Kom argues that since these institutions did not emerge as a result of an inner drive nay necessity, they were bound to remain alien institutions:

> …the African university, which in the opinion of UNESCO experts is the least developed in the world, has in no way emanated from the will of the peoples on the Continent to acquire the tools that would allow them to resolve the crucial problems of their own space or to transform their environment…the universities established by the colonial administrations underwent no significant structural change from the moment of their inception and they have remained poorly integrated in a society, where the barely developed curriculum remains without any identity of its own, it is simple to demonstrate that the African university is a legacy of an extremely extraverted colonization (Kom 2005: 5).

The institutions could not fulfil these requirements because they are not natural products required by the situation. I do not question the need for establishing universities in Kenya, Ethiopia or Ghana. Rather I question the legitimacy of attempting to transplant a foreign institution designed to work in a totally different socio-historical context at a different level of development. Examining the curricula of these inaugural African universities makes my point clear as Balsvik notes in connection with the Haile Selassie I University (HSIU):

> The University was a foreign transplant and remained so for a long time; it relied heavily on foreign funds, administrators, advisors, staff, *curricula* and degree requirements. In this respect it was characteristic of most African universities (Balsvik 2005: 23, emphasis mine).

In light of Balsvik's remarks, are African universities in fact intended really to be vehicles of change as their founding documents report or are there other reasons lurking behind the official reasons? Haile Selassie in

numerous addresses to university students in the 1950s and 60s stated that instead of emulating the developed countries' practices, students and university graduates should concern themselves with problems confronting Ethiopian society. He emphasized the role of education in improving agriculture, exploiting mineral resources and the like. However, the only university that the country had during the Emperor's nearly half a century rule carried out these tasks. Despite his rhetoric to the contrary, Haile Selassie wanted his university to produce "educated persons" in line with the Western model. His primary interest was in securing loyal, educated subjects who were ready to use their acquired knowledge to consolidate and legitimize the Emperor's rule. To generalize, colonial administrators established universities to shape their students in the service of colonialism. "Decolonizing" minds was an objective remote from their intentions. Kom summarises the purpose of education under the direct or indirect rule of colonialism as follows:

> For the colonizer, in fact, the colonized – educated or not – will never be other than a subordinate, a subaltern, hardly prepared to think by himself or to take initiatives of any importance without the prior opinion of the master. University education simply allows the latter to assign new tasks without allowing the subaltern entire responsibility for directing his own destiny. The local university simply allows for the training of mimics, puppet men or women, since the power conceded to them must be exercised in a dependent mode. Just as the colonial authority defines the curriculum to be taught, it also exercises direct or indirect control on the products put into operation by the established system (2005:6).

The university definitely is something that every country needs and Africa is no exception. What is different in the case of Africa is that sufficient attempts have not been made to make this institution an African institution. Its curricula, its functionaries including faculty and its sources of funding reduced it to an institution that is there to serve the interests of those who are responsible for its emergence.

Hountondji characterizes the African university as a highly extraverted institution largely concerned with posing as an outpost of the metropolitan universities. Its professors are ready to play a role subsidiary to the professors in the North. It largely remained a foreign and an alien institution that made little or no efforts to indigenize itself. It failed to be part of the society in which it functions. The theories that it propagates are largely foreign; the problems that it wants to solve are also largely not indigenous problems. Research funders dictate the kinds of research to be undertaken at African universities. Hence research projects amplify the interests of funding agencies and countries in the end. African countries in the main stand to benefit little or not in the case of donor-driven research.

Because of funding and extraverted curricula, Eurocentric assumptions ground African universities. What is universal must be European, and what is African must be merely particular. Issa Shivji notes:

> We essentially are teaching European social sciences which we dutifully accept as universal…. This is the other, very fundamental concern that African academics still have to address. The knowledge we impart is crafted based on the premises within the paradigms of white studies. It is Eurocentric through and through. What is European is universal; the non-European is at best multicultural or at worst parochial. The European is science; while the non-European is supernatural (Shivji 2005: 3-4).

African universities teach the superiority not only of European science and technology but also the superiority of European ethical values. They propagate Europe's metaphysical superiority. With what result? Our African youth, those with and without means, wish to emigrate to Europe or North America. Our African economic problems notwithstanding, how can we convince young persons to stay at home after we have miseducated them to believe that their African ways of life are neither valuable nor real in many respects?

African universities do not prepare students to navigate their realities. They learn to denigrate not only the rural ways of life lived by the overwhelming majority of Africans but also urban ways of life, culture, values and the like. After their university careers, young persons have filled their heads with European "universal" knowledge. But they know very little about contexts of their cultures and countries. Even before they complete their university or even high school studies many students start longing for the "ideal" and enviable life in the West. Educational institutions at all levels, not simply the university level, are in part responsible for this veneration of what is foreign as well as contempt for the indigenous. The media also play an important role in this regard.

University miseducation robs young persons of their self-confidence, their pride, in their cultural ways of being. They contemplate the West and yearn for a comfortable life that others have built rather than building one for themselves at home – with all the attendant hardship home-building requires. Marx and Engels talk of the idiocy of rural life in "The Communist Manifesto." Enlightenment thinkers characterized African ways of life in negative ways. Our university education plays an important role in propagating such prejudices and unfounded biases against Africa and the Africans.

A. Kom notes:

> …colonial authority has created the university in Africa by taking careful account not only of the representation it wishes to make of itself through the education dispensed but also by fixing from

the very beginning the image that Africans should have of themselves and of their university studies. And that image is solidly inscribed in subordination (Kom 2005: 5).

Academic freedom is another grave problem for African universities. The absence of academic freedom stifles the creation of new knowledge. The repressive nature of many African regimes has had a devastating impact on university research and teaching. Many faculty are forced to confine their activities to the university campus. Faculty ventures into sensitive political and moral issues can have deadly consequences. Many faculty cannot discharge their moral responsibility to cultivate a responsible citizenry. Education without a sense of civic responsibility both for the professor and the student is vacuous. A primary responsibility of faculty is to the populations that make universities possible. Many African governments are succeeding through repressive means to force professors to involve themselves in teaching and teaching alone without looking at what is going on around them in their larger societies.

Loss of academic freedom for teachers impacts students as well. Many faculty cannot safely encourage students to participate in socially, politically and economically meaningful extracurricular activities because of government sanctions. By working in a repressive way both towards faculty and students many governments in Africa demand that university faculty and students either support them or keep silent. Houngnikpo states, "Concern that universities and colleges might be sanctuaries for rebels and antirevolution sentiment has forced leaders to neglect university campuses and libraries" (Houngnikpo 2006: 160).

What hope can there be, then, for the future of the African university? By drawing a comparison with Asian university education, Kom says it is still possible to have universities that can fulfil their countries' needs.

> …each country and region has adapted its educational and research systems according to the requirement of its economic, political, cultural, social and technological development. Educational and research programs must be adapted to the challenges that a given society chooses to enhance. Thus a number of Asian societies with Japan in the lead are cited as models of communities that have succeeded in localizing occidental technology, without losing any significant aspect of their own identity (Kom 2005: 4-5).

Instead of succumbing to the grand narratives of the European enlightenment or renaissance African universities must stand on their own. As Hountondji argues,

> We must aim high and far, we must try to appropriate, in the long term, all the scientific heritage available in the world, … develop

it ourselves in a selective and independent manner, depending on our real needs and programs.… the scientific and technological treasure today controlled by the North was in fact created over the centuries by the participation of all peoples. On the other hand, a methodical and critical appropriation of, and an effort to update, what is usually called traditional knowledge must accompany this vast movement of appropriation (Hountondji 2002: 243-244).

Bleak though the founding histories of African universities may be, what is being undertaken by the World Bank and African governments to reform universities since the 1980s presents an even more threatening prospect.

World Bank university reform movements insist that African universities be profit-oriented and work in accordance with the principles of the market. More alarming is the World Bank philosophy that higher education is a private rather than a public good. Higher education is not a public good in the same way that lighthouses, traffic lights, national armies and navies and the like are public goods. However, the product of higher education, the creation of new knowledge to solve society's unsolved problems, is a public good (Smith 2005: 171). He writes:

I believe the origins of the obviously fallacious application of this distinction to higher education can be found in a confusion concerning exactly what the good is that is at stake in higher education, and to whom it accrues. The university is not a public good in relation to the individual students who are educated within it. However, it might be considered a public good in relation to the knowledge and development, *in general*, to which it contributes (Smith 2005: 172-173).

University "reforms" in Africa that are driven by the World Bank are based on this assumption that the university or higher education in general is a private and not a public good. But a counter argument can be developed against this in terms of the overall use that knowledge produced in institutions of higher learning has for society.

Moreover, one would have thought of the university, in my opinion, as a place of sustained critical reflection, to articulate society's problems and come up with solutions for these problems, which are deep and multifaceted. In such a situation no one form of knowledge has *the* answer to the problems. Solutions require enhancing cross-disciplinary learning and research in both outside and indigenous sources.

The kind of universities that the World Bank plans for Africa is a somewhat different one. Chachage writes:

The World Bank envisioned a network of market-oriented 'centres of excellence' replacing the present university system. In the view of the World Bank education was bound up with the development of the overall economy. The crucial and determining factor was the question of employment (and unemployment), since educational levels have an effect on employability. Rhetoric aside, this was an expression in a subtle way of the view that universities should be turned into vocational schools in all but name (Chachage 2006:56).

The World Bank philosophy of higher education views knowledge as a commodity. The World Bank has the power to impose its philosophy on African governments in many ways. One result is that fields of science and technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) gain currency at the expense of the social sciences and humanities. STEM disciplines are to be preferred over others because of the assumption that they are vital for underdeveloped countries in Africa. The philosophy behind such thinking borders on racism in the sense that it assumes that for the developing countries it would be enough if they could engage in certain fields which have directly to do with the production of immediately needed products and skills that may be necessary to start up and run businesses. African countries that have experienced centuries of denigration through the slave trade and colonialism actually need to develop fields of knowledge that would enable them to soberly reflect on these issues. The act of decolonizing the mind and deconstructing the grip of Eurocentrism on the African mind requires much more than information and communications technology and business administration, without of course undermining the roles for these skills in nation building.

Issa Shivji sums up current World Bank educational philosophy in the following way:

Knowledge production must be privatized and knowledge products must be commoditized…. Train entrepreneurs who can sell *mandazi* more profitably, *hewala! bwana*. Informatics and the virtual are real and your real world is supernatural, *ndio! bwana*. Times have changed. No doubt our universities are transforming and are being transformed – from sites of knowledge production to sites of hotel construction; from building lecture halls to pre-fabricating shopping malls. From the culture of collegiality, which was the hallmark of the university, we are now in the thick of corporate vultures (Shivji 2005: 3).

We vividly remember the days in the 1970s and 80s when the African countries were the battlegrounds of the ideological struggles between the West and the East. Following the country from which the ruling group of an African country drew its legitimacy, the university curricula and the

educational system were copied from either those of the West or of the then Soviet Union and her satellites. Currently the forces of globalization and the so called free market economy replace the communism/capitalism conflict. The World Bank now leads the charge against a philosophy of higher education that grounds the university in service of society.

The university must be an institution that spearheads the production and dissemination of knowledge in all areas and fields. It should not be restricted to focusing on producing immediately saleable skills. The expansion of the horizon of knowledge in all fields and respects and working particularly towards looking for ideas that are useful and key in overcoming the problems of poverty must be the guiding principles of an African university. Such universities are surrounded by poverty, ignorance and the other attributes of so-called developing countries. Overcoming these should be the cardinal aim of any African university.

Nyerere notes:

Thus our university, like all others worthy of the name, must provide the facilities and the opportunities for the highest intellectual inquiry. It must encourage and challenge its students to develop their powers of constructive thinking. It must encourage its academic staff to do original research and to play a full part in promoting intelligent discussion of issues of human concern. It must do all these things because they are part of being a university; they are part of its reason of existing (Nyerere quoted in *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* Vol. 4, No. 2, 2006: 54).

In conclusion we must bear in mind the kinds of assumptions under which modern education began in many African countries. The Western assumption that everything has to begin anew was an assault on everything that was indigenous. It is through such an approach that the Africans were uprooted and left only to mimic what the West considers universal. There is no denying that formal education as it was started by the West did not exist. However, it does not mean that Africans did not educate their children. Indeed they educated their children in the different forms of knowledge required to operate in the African environment. The young generations were educated in skills that were necessary. They were also educated on the values and morals of their own societies to become responsible citizens. Julius O. Adekunle writes:

African education was collectively provided for the benefit of the entire society. It was an education acquired for life in the community through a continuous and consistent process and for the continuity of the society. Education was both individual and community-oriented. The patterns of a child and the community

conjoined in developing an intellectually and morally balanced person, as well as a vibrant, solid, and congenial society (quoted in Houngnikpo 2006: 157).

Studies on indigenous African education show that in Africa education is a life-long process. The introduction of modern education could have been carried out without taking a hostile approach to the age-old ways in which Africans educated their children. The result of the approach and the biases of the West against African ways make particularly the elderly and those who are not uprooted consider what their children learn with suspicion. It is common to come across expressions by elderly persons that school is where their children unlearn what they learned at home. Such a judgement arises from the attitude the young persons develop to the indigenous knowledge and ways of life immediately after being introduced to modern education. The immediate effect is that students become alienated from their groups. As Houngnikpo argues,

> …Europeans who assumed that there was no history, culture, or civilization in Africa, spared no effort to fundamentally alter societies. Consistent with their premises, they imposed their culture on Africans in an attempt to "Europeanize" those who should help them to reach their goals. Until it became important to have intermediate clerks, Europeans did very little to educate Africans (Houngnikpo 2006: 157).

Despite its shortcomings and biases, there is no doubt that European-style education has contributed much to Africa. Without the university education that started half a century ago, it would be impossible to talk about the situation in which we are at present. But it is important to go beyond where we are now. It is necessary to take an inventory of what we have achieved and what we must do to go forward. As Houngnikpo states,

> The challenge to African cultures is to develop African versions of educational philosophies that teach thinking skills, problem-solving, and creative independence, not to become Western or even modern or developed, but simply to deal effectively with the likelihood of constant societal change in the future. Educational systems that attempt merely to transmit culture, whether African or Western, will not accomplish this. The cultural conflict is deep, the challenge is great (quoted in Houngnikpo 2006: 159).

It is essential to question the philosophy of our education. What are the underpinning principles of our educational systems? Do we need creative citizens who are capable of solving our problems or just imitating Western education? This should be one of the important questions asked while shaping an educational system. Education in general and university

education in particular could be up to the challenges of present-day Africa if it is able to teach youth how to think clearly and critically in a manner oriented towards solving society's problems and achieving our independence.

We need to develop our own versions of educational philosophies that pay due attention to our specific situation without being isolationist. As said above, we have to be able to learn from Asia and particularly Japan, where it has been possible to change without much damage to the indigenous customs, cultures and knowledge.

> African cultures need to develop African versions of educational philosophies that take into account the manners and customs of the continent, and yet can be flexible enough to interact with other cultures. Without having to reinvent the wheel, Africans should be conversant enough in other cultures and civilizations to learn from them. This has been done in other parts of the world, in Asia specifically, without too great damage to culture (Houngnikpo 2006: 160).

We need to constantly reflect on the essence and responsibility of the university. Historically, particularly in the developed countries, universities played important roles by producing and sheltering the kind of scientific, technological, and normative knowledge that have been vital for development. The social and civic responsibilities of a university are enormous and they should be made to tally with the aim of producing useful knowledge in all areas that are essential as vehicles of change. In the context of the developed countries the role the university played in the process of development is something worthy of emulating. Now these countries have basically solved many of their problems of development.

Ours is a context of huge poverty and backwardness. It is essential for us to work out what the role of the university ought to be in such a context. A mere focus on skills of entrepreneurship or ICT at the expense of other fundamental areas of knowledge is not helpful in this context. Above everything else we should find some consensus on what our university and its tasks should be, rather than accepting ideas imposed from outside for motives that would not likely promote our interests. As A. Olukoshi notes: "In a context where poverty and inequalities continue to pose formidable hurdles to development, concentrating on narrow market-oriented understanding of higher education might undermine the social and civic responsibilities of the academy to the ordinary African" (Olukoshi 2005: 1).

It is necessary to take advice, but it is also necessary to differentiate between what is useful for us and what is not, based on our interests, desires and aspirations. The question, therefore, is, can we, in a situation of poverty and the asymmetries of wealth and power, focus on the World Bank's blue-print of what tertiary education ought to be? Would education conceived along such narrow market-driven lines enable our universities to be up to

the challenges of contemporary Africa? By focusing on a system of education that can promote the social and civic responsibilities of the university we can better tackle our problems.

Rethinking the university in Africa is not an issue of reinventing the wheel. Rather it is an issue of decolonizing the mind. It is an issue of discovering oneself and also discovering the useful things in our indigenous knowledge. Moreover it is an issue of being sceptical about everything that claims to be "universal". Zara Yacob in the 17th century asked, "Is everything that is written in the Holy Scriptures true?" (Sumner 1976: 7) We must imitate him in being sceptical of some of the grand narratives of modernity – especially about the universality of a philosophy and culture embedded in global Northern experience.

We need not undermine what has been achieved so far through the type of education that has been established. We attempt to indigenize curricula and seek relevance although our efforts fall short of the moral mission of our universities. One problem in this regard has been the lack of confidence on the part of many of us. We can trace this lack of confidence to the kind of education that we received. Ideas implanted in us as absolute truths hinder us from venturing into new areas. We must deconstruct the ideas that have been appropriated in this way. The royal path to self-confidence and establishing one's knowledge and values as indispensable and integral parts of the knowledge and values of humanity must begin with a deconstruction that could put the occidental ideas in their proper perspective. Occidental philosophies and cultures are embedded in a specific experience and must be taken as such.

REFERENCES

Balsvik, R. Ronning**. 2005.** *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution 1952-1974.* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Chachage. Seithy L, C. 2006. "The University as Site of Knowledge: The Role of Basic Research." *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*. Vol. 4. No. 2, 46-67.

Coetze, P. H. and Roux, A. P. J. (eds.), 1998. *The African Philosophy Reader*. London: Routledge.

Eze, E. Chukwudi. (ed.), 1998. *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Hallen, Barry. 2002. *A Short History of African Philosophy*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Houngnikpo, Mathurin. 2006. *Africa's Elusive Quest for Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hountondji, P. 2002. *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Hymans, I. L. 1971. *Leopold S. Senghor: An Intellectual Biography*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Irele, Abiola. 1990. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Kebede, Messay. 2004. *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization.* Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi.

Kom, Ambrose. Redesigning the African University: Emerging from Subalternity*, CODESRIA Bulletin* No. 1 & 2, 2005, Dakar: Imprimerie Saint Paul, 4-8.

Masolo, Dismas. A. 1994. *African Philosophy in Search of Identity.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Mkandawire, Thandika. (ed.), 2005. *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development.* London/New York: Zed Books.

Shivji, Issa. Whither University? *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 1 & 2 2005, Dakar: Imprimerie Saint Paul, 3-4.

Smith, Daniel. 2005. Universities on the Threshold of the New Millennium, In Gutema, Bekele and D. Smith. (eds.), *African Philosophy at the Threshold of the New Millennium*, Addis Abba: Addis Ababa University Press.

Sumner, Claude. 1976. *Ethiopian Philosophy: the Treatise of Zara Yacob and of Walda Heywat.* Vol II. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

Tempels, Placide. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africáine**.**

Wiredu, Kwasi. (ed.), 2004. *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

THE CHALLENGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF UNIVERSAL OTHERNESS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

DANIEL SMITH (†)

In this paper I want to reflect in a fairly schematic and idiosyncratic manner on a number of prominent contemporary philosophers in relation to the specific experience of establishing a new Masters/PhD program in philosophy at Addis Ababa University. Philosophers from varying backgrounds such as Paulin Hountondji, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Enrique Dussel have all struggled to do philosophy in a manner that both retains the universalistic aspirations of philosophy while acknowledging and remaining accessible and open to the full range of human experience and wisdom.

Jacques Derrida, in his later work, refers to the "messianic structure" of speech, as based in the "universal structure of the promise;" which does not just characterize one speech act among others but rather rests in the fact that "each time I open my mouth, I am promising something" (Derrida 1997: 22). Philosophy's struggle to understand and say something universal about the existential conditions of our humanity has become all the more imperative, in my opinion, in the context of the global challenges that we (humanity) are currently facing. Of course it might seem extremely over-ambitious to attempt such a reflection within the confines of a short essay like this one; however I believe that in sharing these reflections based in the emergence of a new philosophy program in Ethiopia, I might contribute to the development of a better understanding of the nature, role and ethos of philosophy in today's world.

Over the last few years, Addis Ababa University (AAU) has been engaged in a systematic reorganization with the objective of establishing the University as a "pre-eminent African institution of research and graduate studies" (AAU Strategic Planning and Reform Documentation, 2007). In this context the Department of Philosophy has launched a new MA/PhD graduate program. After a good deal of internal debate the Department declared the following:

> [I]n recognition of the dynamics of research and graduate studies within the context of what is referred to as an emerging "knowledge economy" and globalization, the Department's program is designed to reconstruct existing hegemonies in the production and dissemination of knowledge and root itself in the cultural, political, economic, and spiritual reality of Ethiopia.... Thus it seeks to establish a new

philosophical orientation relevant to the 21st century challenges of development and globalization that is rooted within the Ethiopian context and which will also make a unique contribution to Philosophy as a universal discipline (MA/PhD Program Proposal, Department of Philosophy, AAU, 2007).

Given such objectives and declarations we might be immediately tempted to ask what the adjective 'African' means in terms of research and graduate studies and how one can establish a graduate program in philosophy – a supposedly quintessential universal academic discipline, while at the same time remaining rooted in the unique locality of Ethiopia?

Clearly, the adjective 'African' in the documents referred to above is not meant to be a pejorative indication of the less than fully realized nature of research and graduate studies in Africa. Henry Odera Oruka once humorously lamented in reference to some popular, and even scholarly, uses of the terms 'African democracy' or 'African religion' this pejorative connotation (Hountondji 2002: 135). No, for me, and I would like to suggest for all of us, we could best understand the invocation of this adjective, 'African', along the lines of Michel Foucault. What the adjective 'African' articulates is an acknowledgement and affirmation of Africa's unique epistemological position within the increasingly globalized "regimes of truth" that constitute the conditions which make successful, i.e. powerful, research and graduate studies possible throughout the world today. Thus, to invoke an 'African' location within these regimes is to commit oneself to the project of "detaching the power of truth [and knowledge] from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault, 1984: 75).

It goes without saying that all African philosophers or philosophers who do philosophy in Africa are quite familiar with this problematique; and in my opinion no better philosopher can be found for addressing it than Paulin Hontondji, whose life work has been and continues to be based in the challenges of being an *African* philosopher. He has struggled to elaborate a philosophical position as an African, rooted in the existential conditions of Africa, while not allowing himself to be trapped in the particular nor renouncing his right and responsibility to the universal (Hountondji 2002). In an article, from an earlier work, *Philosophy and its Revolutions*, Hountondji writes that the individual philosopher, as an individual, has an "absolute responsibility," a responsibility to "take part in the gradual unveiling of a truth that is not mine but everyone's" (Hountondji 1996: 72).

Now, as indicated above, given the limitations of this essay, at this point I will not embark on a rigorous review of the intricacies of current debates concerning Foucault's, Jürgen Habermas's, and other positions concerning knowledge, power, human interests, etc. Rather, I want to continue to share and reflect on the concrete experience of establishing a graduate philosophy program in Ethiopia in reference to some of the

specific issues that have emerged from such more abstract academic exchanges, and then offer some tentative suggestions as to the general direction or manner in which we might proceed.

During the course of interviewing potential students for our graduate program a friend and colleague of mine prefaced a question concerning the role of philosophy in Ethiopia with the phrase: "Given the postmetaphysical nature of contemporary philosophy ... "(Departmental Proceedings, Department of Philosophy, AAU, October, 2007). As a member of the interviewing committee I found myself objecting, rather strenuously, that this was an inappropriate and quite Eurocentric frame of reference within which to force a potential student to respond to a question regarding the role of philosophy in Ethiopia. My colleague's response to my criticism was that the student was free to respond by challenging that frame of reference. Upon further reflection it struck me that this was a perfect example of what many have suggested is a major weakness of Jürgen Habermas's use of the "ideal speech situation" in developing his "theory of communicative action" which is perhaps one of the most powerful attempts to reestablish a place for a universally oriented discourse within contemporary philosophy, the social sciences, and human knowledge in general (Habermas 1984/87).

Ideally, of course, my colleague, and still friend, was correct. The student could have challenged the background consensus invoked concerning contemporary philosophy's "postmetaphysical nature." Indeed this would have been a paradigmatic example of a move from what Habermas refers to as the normal level of communicative interaction to a level in which the discursive vindication of validity claims becomes the focus of the communicative exchange (Habermas 79: 63-64). However, upon further reflection it struck me that this rather seemed like a good example of where the admittedly "counterfactual" nature of the "ideal speech situation" as universally acknowledged and the pragmatic value orientation of communicative action becomes problematic. Somehow, the extremely asymmetrical nature of the power relations, unavoidably institutionalized in such proceedings, was deferred to the margins of the interview process. Not only that, but the hegemony of what for many of us are the existing Eurocentric regimes of truth was reinforced rather than challenged as Foucault suggests they should be in the quotation invoked above.

Of course such examples do not necessarily undermine Habermas' whole project, for surely no one is suggesting that the counterfactual presuppositions of the ideal speech situation should ever be assumed to be operant in any actual communicative interaction. However, in a collection of essays entitled *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Morality*, Habermas has argued that what he refers to as "methodological atheism" is a necessary condition for the development of a discourse ethics that would retain a rational claim to universal consent, and that "a philosophy that oversteps the bounds of methodological atheism loses its philosophical seriousness" (Habermas 2002: 160). Eduardo Mendieta, as

the editor of this collection, suggests that for Habermas, "methodological atheism" is "the only acceptable option for postmetaphysical and enlightened philosophy" (Ibid. 26). Thus, we return to my colleague's assumption that in understanding the role of philosophy in Ethiopia, or the world, we must work within a "postmetaphysical" paradigm.

Enrique Dussel has criticized such claims in developing his *Philosophy of Liberation* (1985). A brief essay by Michael Michau of Purdue University argues that Dussel's defense of a "preferential option for the poor," based in Latin American theology of liberation might augment Habermas's "merely formal discourse ethics" which is based in his more general *Theory of Communicative Action"* (Michau: 1).

How, asks Michau in elaborating Dussel's position, does Habermas deal with perhaps a majority of the human population who find it difficult and even heretical to "set [their] religious affiliations aside" and rely solely on "intersubjective rationality and the 'unforced force of the stronger argument'?' (Ibid: 3). Rather than with a purely formalistic and abstract discourse ethics and theory of communicative action we should begin with the imperative to address the actual material conditions of the lives of the majority who have been marginalized by modernity. Here, Michau refers to Dussel's concept of "transmodernity, a world-wide ethical liberation project in which alterity, which was part and parcel of modernity, would be able to fulfill itself" (Michau quoting Dussel, 6). Michau elaborates Dussel's position in the following manner: "Alterity is the infinite otherness of the Other individual, originally theorized by Levinas, but appropriated by Dussel. Thinking from the periphery is comparable to respecting the alterity of another individual" (Ibid.).

This brings me back to Derrida's "universal messianic structure" of the speech act referred to in the beginning of this essay. What I would like to suggest in conclusion, albeit in a necessarily truncated fashion[1] is a kind of philosophical ethos that might guide us forward into the future development of an African philosophy with universal aspirations, commitments and responsibilities. Following Hountondji, as philosophers we must commit ourselves and take absolute responsibility for participating

---

[1] I would also like to refer to Fred Dallmayr's development of an "agonal" model of dialogue as opposed to Habermas's consensual model (Dallmayr, 1996). In a previous work, *Culture, Democracy and Conflict*, I presented as part of UNESCO'S International Philosophy Day, 2006, I suggested that "the dichotomy between [identity] decentration in Habermas vs. [identity] valorization in Dallmayr constitutes a false dichotomy. Under the right conditions human beings are perfectly capable of both valorizing one's unique cultural identities and that of others and seeking to transcend one's own particularity by methodologically decentering ones own cultural and psychological predispositions. Not only is the dichotomy false but I would suggest that either one without the other is indeed extremely dangerous."

in the articulation of "a truth that is not mine but everyone's" (Hountondji 1996: 72), while at the same time being true to the promise and trust that such a practice entails referred to by Derrida:

> This "trust me, I am speaking to you" is of the order of faith, a faith that cannot be reduced to a theoretical statement, a determinant judgment [as Habermas might have it]; it is the opening of the address to the other (Derrida 1997:22).

Elsewhere, I have heard it said that in a sense we are all other than our 'selves'; perhaps this is especially true for those who would defend and develop African philosophy. But, here we are, irrevocably opening ourselves to a coming, the coming of another. Something new!

REFERENCES

Derrida, J. 1997. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, John Caputo (Ed.), New York: Fordham University Press.

Dussel, H. 1985. *Philosophy of Liberation*, Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Trans), Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers.

Foucault, M. 1984. *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow (Ed.), New York: Pantheon Books.

Habermas, J. 2002. *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, Eduardo Mendieta (ed.), Cambridge: MIT Press.

_____. 1984/87. *Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., Thomas McCarthy (Trans.), Boston: Beacon Press.

_____. 1979. What is Universal Pragmatics? *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Thomas McCarthy (Trans.), Boston: Beacon Press.

Hountondji, P. 2002. *The Struggle for Meaning; Reflections on Philosophy, Culture, and Democracy in Africa*, John Conteh-Morgan (Trans.), Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies.

_____.1996. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (2nd Edition), Henri Evans (Trans.), Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Michau, M. 2005. *A Discourse Ethics of Liberation? Dialectical and Analectical Transcendence in Habermas and Dussel*, accessed April 7, 2006 at http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~mmichau/CPA-paper.pdf.

SECTION II

PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE

CHAPTER IV

HARNESSING MYTH TO RATIONALITY

MESSAY KEBEDE

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a solution to what seems an African dilemma. The attempt to rehabilitate various African philosophical schools generates a paradox. Thinkers like Senghor and Diop endorse some of the implications of the colonial discourse even as they try to refute it. Before attempting to develop a solution, let us spell out the terms of the dilemma by a rapid review of the basic arguments of each school.

THE AFRICAN DILEMMA

We are familiar with the charge that ethnophilosophy is an endorsement of the colonial discourse. The attempt to refute the characterization of Africans as prelogical by the assertion of difference only succeeds in ascribing a non-rational mode of thinking to the African self, the consequence of which is the perpetuation of marginality. Thus Leopold S. Senghor's advocacy of emotion as an African specificity compromises the prospect of African modernization. Scientific and technological orientations are incompatible with a turn of mind by emotional connection with the world.

Though the professional philosophers initiate the above criticism of ethnophilosophy, they do not escape the charge of endorsement of the colonial idea of Africa. Their commitment to the universality of the human mind cannot but establish a contrast between Africa and the achievements of the West such that the African difference appears as a lag, thereby resurrecting the evolutionary terms of backwardness and prelogicality. Though the conception promises that Africa will catch up with the West, the assent given to the idea of backwardness hampers the march towards progress.

The merit of the deconstructionist is to have understood the extent to which the internalization of the Western representations blocks the African initiative. Freedom can return to Africa only if Africans disengage from Western definitions. However, since the price of the disengagement is the acceptance of relativism, the freedom that the deconstructionist promises lacks the sense of its objectivity, and so is wanting in conviction and power. Without power, decolonization is not effective.

One appealing exit is to reject the path of difference by putting the blame for African retardation on the West. Cheikh Anta Diop follows this road when he ascribes the paternity of rationality to Africa via Egypt. The idea of the stolen legacy attributes the lag of Africa to a protracted war waged against the black race. Modern slavery and colonialism are only

recent episodes in this long crusade to deprive the black race of its rightful place. Everything appears as though the Marxist notion of the class struggle could be extended to include the phase of the racial confrontation resulting in the reduction of a creative race to servitude. In addition to being immersed in the controversial thesis of black Egypt, Diop's view sanctions the idea of human races with all the drawbacks that the notion entails.

Is there a way to maintain the West as a culprit while avoiding the racialization of the conflict between oppressors and oppressed? Such a thesis would emphasize that Africa and Europe were at a comparable traditional stage until the breakthrough of European modernity accelerated the gap. Europe used this advance caused by circumstances to block the progress of Africa by the hemorrhage of slavery and the imposition of colonial rule. Franz Fanon's theory of a polarized and terminal conflict between "the wretched of the earth" and colonizers fully approves an approach blaming the West for Africa's underdevelopment. Similarly, Kwasi Wiredu's concept of comparable traditionality between the West and Africa can be interpreted as supporting the idea of Western culpability.

Maurice Delafosse remains the incontestable precursor of the view blaming Europe for Africa's social and technological retardation. To dispel the belief that the black race is intellectually inferior, Delafosse argues that a historical review of the African continent clearly shows that many African societies had attained a level of civilization comparable to the stage reached by European countries during the time of Charlemagne. The rise of West African empires, such as the Ghanaian, the Songhai, the Mandingo and the Mossi empires, with their high degree of state organization and their centers of religious, philosophic, and scientific studies, the most famous being Timbuktu and Gao, gives evidence of the advances accomplished by the African medieval age. The question that comes to mind is why the advancement was not pursued.

Delafosse's answer considers two interrelated matters. (1) He asks us to appreciate that whatever Africans have accomplished, they have done so without outside help. While other peoples were able to advance thanks to contacts with and borrowings from other civilizations, Africans present the unique case of complete isolation imposed by the formidable barrier of the Sahara. To quote Delafosse:

> ... the negroes of Africa, isolated from the Mediterranean lake which during millenniums, has been the only vehicle of world civilization, were not able, in the absence of the emulation created by constant contacts with the outside world, to progress in a way that was possible, for example, in the case of the Gauls under the influence of Roman civilization (1968: 279).

(2) He underlines the sad and unfortunate fact that, when technological progress finally overcame the natural obstacle and ended the African isolation, the purpose of the people who landed on the shores of Africa was

first to tear away, anew, thousands of slaves, then, to inundate them with alcohol, and finally, without preparation, to thrust the civilization of the nineteenth century in the midst of other civilizations which had remained contemporaries with Charlemagne (Ibid).

No lengthy demonstration is necessary to admit that the Western predilection for slaves and colonies turned out to be utterly degrading for Africans. Those African scholars, Marxists or otherwise, who attribute African underdevelopment to Western domination and exploitation support the thesis of the culpability of the West. Their approach agrees with the analyses of the neo-Marxist school known as the dependency school. For Andre Gunder Frank, the main thinker of the dependency school, traditionality or backwardness simply means "non development," whereas underdevelopment is the product of the satellization of third world countries (Frank 1969: 94). As a mechanism of surplus appropriation, satellization ensures the enrichment of centers at the expense of peripheries. Implicit in this analysis is the abstention of the dependency school from sanctioning the idea of difference. Nor does it put the blame for African retardation on the African past. This exculpation of the past avoids the endorsement of the prelogicality of precolonial Africa.

Notwithstanding the promise of positive gains, the rejection of African difference passes over the distinction between tradition and modernity. Worse, the approach supports the Hegelian notion of unilinear history. It simply substitutes the idea of peoples reduced to underdevelopment for the notion of retarded peoples. Some such substitution does not challenge the Hegelian scheme: underdevelopment is a confiscated, suppressed modernity, not a state of affairs prompted more by cultural divergences than by impediments or primitiveness. Not only does this conception of underdevelopment completely underrate the crucial role of change in the generation of modernity, but also endorses the universality of modernist ventures.

The same oversight weighs down Delafosse's approach. The thesis concedes that Africans were on the same track as the West until isolation prevented them from performing as well as Westerners. Compelled to invent everything by themselves, they have lost much time, and so lag behind. The understanding of the African situation in terms of lag definitely intimates that Africans would have reached a level of development similar to the West were they not hampered by environmental obstacles and, most of all, by European conquest and colonization. Delafosse sees Western civilization, not as a product of specific choices emanating a no less specific historical orientation, but as a natural target of human beings wherever they are. So he speaks of lag instead of difference.

This universalist approach prevents the perception of the real meaning of modernity. It does not allow the radical understanding of the Western venture, the singularity of its inspiration, and the formidable challenge that the venture poses to non-Western cultures. The comprehension of Western scientific and technological ventures as natural products of growth that

other cultures would produce were they not dominated glosses over the painful choices and sacrifices implied in change as well as over the original disparity of cultural orientations.

To become aware of the need to change is to reconnect with one's specificity so as to map out a new direction in which a recovered centrality inspires borrowings from and dealings with the West. The power to change too is dependent on the reconnection with specificity, since historicity – without which no sense of mission arises – feeds on continuity. This backward journey into the past is how the new and the past fuse into a new synthesis. But then, the best way to get out of the African dilemma is neither to assert nor to deny the African difference; it is not to look for an uncontaminated vision of the past essence either. The recognition of the concomitance of myth and rationality, of traditionality and modernity, is the appropriate way to defuse the African dilemma. No better refutation of the colonial discourse is to be found than in the exposure of complementarity in the alleged contrast between myth and reason.

The position that myth and rationality are concomitant makes room for African difference without succumbing to otherness. It posits an original orientation by which a culture makes sense of life and assigns a specific task to rationality. The assignment suggests that the way rationality is used can vary from one culture to another. In this regard, Placide Tempels' approach is exemplary: he argues that the way the mind of the Bantu functions is different because rationality is harnessed to a different purpose, not because it lacks rationality. To redirect rationality toward science and technology, the correct path is less to initiate discontinuity through the relegation of the past to prelogicality than to reformulate the inspiring myths of the culture in accordance with present needs. The reformulation is the recovery of historicity, which transcends the conflict between otherness and sameness by the very act of making tradition pregnant with modernity.

Let us insist on the ability of historicity to succeed where universalist and relativist definitions of Africa fail. The universalist option necessarily brings back evolutionary concepts; the strategy of otherness takes rationality away from Africa, while the relativization of commitment dilutes the particularism of deconstruction. The different approach of historicity starts by stating that what is wrong with negritude is not so much the claim to difference as the ascription of the difference to racial attributes. If instead of drawing the difference from racial, natural characteristics, negritude had attributed it to an act of choice, it would have moved in the direction of historicity. The intervention of choice invalidates the debate over the racial reality or non-reality of the black essence. What is accomplished as a result of choice refers to freedom, and so excludes objective determinism. The accomplishment, however specific, does not bar other human potentials; it simply springs from different utilizations of universal human aptitudes as a result of divergent historical choices.

If depending on the initial value orientation or choice of a given culture, rationality can assume different forms, the opposition that negritude

reads between the African and the European approaches to nature loses its demeaning connotation. Choice avoids excluding the rationality of Africans. By removing the social barrier, it also warrants the possibility of changing lanes, of passing from one conception to another through an act of choice. Most importantly, choice moves away from the evolutionary approach: if differences are accountable to choice rather than to backwardness or natural characteristics, the relativity of civilizations becomes unavoidable. Choice is always relative in that the selection of some goals entails the suppression or the giving up of other equally valid goals. The Western option "to become master and possessor of nature" is paid by the loss of other ways of relating with nature. This drawback revalues the African legacy by construing non-technicalness as a pursuit of a different purpose with its positive and negative sides.

The rehabilitating reading confirms that the way out of the African dilemma is the divergent conception of evolution. Contrary to the universalist and stage-producing-stage conception of evolution, divergence implicates splits within the same unity such that the process, in the words of Henri Bergson, "splaying out like a sheaf, sunders, in proportion to their simultaneous growth, terms which at first completed each other so well that they coalesced" (Bergson 1944: 130). This dissociation of the original unity achieves particular outcomes, which are complementary rather than hierarchical. The one outcome does not represent a higher stage, but a divergent course with positive and negative attributes. In light of the complementarity of the divergent courses, the human target should be less the frenzied pursuit of one direction – which is what Westernization is forcibly accomplishing – than the attempt to achieve a harmonious development of human potentials by integrating the positive characters of the divergent courses.

The relativization of the West, not its normativeness, opens the African path to modernity. When the West is presented as the norm, Africans are reduced to imitators, or to speak a more familiar language, to dependency. When the West turns relative through a divergent conception, it becomes an object of assessment, better still, of free choice. With the intervention of choice, the instruction to copy the West gives way to utilitarian questions: what can Africans learn from the West? What must they reject? How can they integrate their borrowings into their continuity? The identification with a rehabilitated past provides the detachment that allows the deployment of such questions. Developing this type of pragmatic relation with the West means the prior decolonization of the African mind, which is neither more nor less than the recovery of freedom. The questions are the very ones that Africans would have raised were they not colonized.

The normativeness of the West has far-reaching detrimental implications. As imitators rather than creators, Africans become totally dependent, and lose their ability to think and act in a steadfast, systematic, and creative manner. A copy never reaches the perfection of the model, and the copyist has less passion and commitment to execute the project. Since

imitators already accept their inferiority and do not strive to deliver their own making, they fall short of being passionate and resolute about their understanding. What they do is always very second-rate; it may even be deliberately messed up out of the naughtiness that comes along when grownups and old cultures stoop to the status of children undergoing a process of domestication under Western tutorship.

No sooner do Africans decide to become imitators than they expose themselves to faulty executions of the model. Since imitation is admission of inferiority, the act by which copyists revere the model is the very act by which they suppress their capacity, thereby putting themselves in the position of committing mistakes. No other way exists to acquire the requirements and the virtues of the model than to deviate by avoiding repetition. You equal the model when you become creative or original, and not when you imitate.

The "essence of progress" as defined correctly by Edward W. Blyden, is the attainment of "*difference*" (Blyden 1967:76). All that is not unique, original, is deficient because it owes its existence to a reduced ability. When creativity takes the lead, the model loses its normative stand and becomes an inspiration. The great difference between inspiration and imitation is that imitation makes a person passive, subordinate; it is lowering and debilitating. Not so with inspiration, which is an appeal to rise to the same standard, if not to go higher. Inspiration is stimulating and emboldening while imitation inculcates self-lowering and dependency.

This analysis sheds some light on the mystery of Africa's apparent inability to go forward. Though African societies adopt Western institutions and values, none of these borrowings seem to function properly. One way of explaining this stagnation is to suggest that imitation commits Africans to failure. Externally, African societies appear to be doing all that is necessary to modernize, but they do it as learners, apprentices who commit mistakes. Unfortunately, these mistakes soon turn into internal blockages that stand in the way of advancement. Just as undigested meal hampers our body, so too the faulty imitation of the West leads to drawbacks that impede the progress of modernization. Take the case of the state. On the assumption that a strong and centralized state is necessary to implement modernization, the conditions of dictatorship are put in place, which conditions conflict with other admitted goals, such as democratization, and prove tougher to remove later.

When the path of dependency is discarded, the attainment of self-reliance emerges as the *sine qua non* of modernization. According to the basic belief of the modernization school, modernization occurs when traditional values, beliefs, and ways of doing things give way to innovative views and methods. In the words of Bert Hoselitz, "in order to have economic advancement, the practice of assigning economic role by ascription, or according to status, must be replaced by the standard of achievement" (Hoselitz 1960: 19). The resurgence of innovative ability has its prime condition in the practice of self-reliance.

The definition of modernity by the liberation of innovative capacity has the interesting twist of putting the blame for Africa's failure to modernize less on the persistence of tradition than on the erection of Western experience as a normative model. Though Hoselitz underscores the role of innovation, he does not hesitate to ask 'in what way the study of the social and economic history of the more advanced countries provides a series of hints for the construction of models" (Hoselitz 1965: 175). Nothing is more contradictory than to emphasize the role of creativity and self-reliance in achieving modernity, and to expect the birth of these same qualities through the imposition of a model whose major defect is to bar self-reliance.

In light of these drawbacks of imitativeness, the central question becomes: what encourages self-reliance? To rely on oneself presupposes the attainment of self-respect and confidence in one's ability, which has to do with self-representation. Empowering self-representations bring in the role of ideology so that, as stated by Norman Long, "re-interpretations of ideology are essential prerequisites of creating a modern society and economy" (Long 1977: 59). If modernity is equally tributary of rationality and ideological representations, we need to understand the condition under which rational thinking and ideological beliefs come to collaborate instead of impairing each other.

THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF MYTH AND RATIONALITY

Where choice intervenes, invention is most active. So is myth-making as a characteristic instance of invention. A major argument of this paper is that the return to the past is not so much the reproduction of the past as a reconstruction, an imaginative movement into the past. Its purpose is the deployment of historicity: the involvement of a mission supposedly handed down from the past connects the past and the future in such a way that the bond unleashes the myth of an unfolding subject, which sustains the theoretical construct of all historical consciousness and development theories. The need for such a myth becomes all the more compelling when peoples come under the marginalizing effect of a prolonged domination. This explains the emergence of African ethnophilosophical discourses, which advocate a return to the source as a way of reviving the historicity of the African subject.

With the involvement of inventiveness, the African ethnophilosophical discourse ceases to present mythical thinking as antithetical to rationality; instead, it comes out in favor of their complementarity. Still less does the discourse racialize Africans, since the refusal to set myth against rationality explicitly invites Africans to assume their freedom. In claiming what the West despises, Africans redefine themselves as negativity, as the antithetical subjectivity intent on recreating humanity by the insertion of values and beliefs extracted from the experience of marginality. Just as Christianity created a new sense of being human by valorizing the poor and

the weak, so too the wretchedness of Africans is out to create a new sense of the human person.

That this creative power exists is easily established if we pay attention to the impossibility of reducing the mythical faculty to mere imagination. Closely following the arguments of Bergson, I endorse the autonomous existence of the myth-making function together with the empowering purpose of the function, the understanding being that excessive valorization of rationality results in the complete asphyxia of the power of the mind. The basic error is to define myth in terms of knowledge, be it as false knowledge or as construction. While ethnophilosophers change myth into a different type of knowledge, that is, into a discrete epistemological orientation, their opponents argue for the distinction between mythical thinking and rational knowledge, and advocate the eradication of the former. For V. Y. Mudimbe too, to the extent that myth is a construction of the world, mythical thinking fulfills the function of knowledge, even if he denies the objectivity of such knowledge.

Of all the theories exposing the involvement of ideological biases in an epistemological orientation claiming to be objective, Marxism provides clear-cut means to denounce the operations of false consciousness without thereby espousing relativism. Provided that certain principles, such as, materialism, scientific attitude, class position, are put to use, Karl Marx believes in the possibility of discriminating between objective knowledge and partisan or biased approaches. These principles guarantee that

> we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process (K. Marx and F. Engels 1965: 14).

Unlike Marx, Mudimbe has no provision for universalizing instances. By reducing indiscriminately everything to construction, he deprives himself of the opportunity of differentiating between ideology and objective conceptions. His emancipated view of Africa is thus condemned to be an invention confronting another invention. My argument does not criticize the idea of invention; it simply points out that relativism clashes with Mudimbe's search for authentic Africa.

As for Marx, his attempt to shun ideological thinking altogether betrays an objectivist commitment that treats mythical thinking as false knowledge. His approach is totally deaf to the suggestion that the involvement of invention does not necessarily entail the impossibility of objective knowledge. If the role of myth is less to deform or conceal reality than to provide galvanizing representations, the assumption that myth complements reason becomes a legitimate statement. Instead of usurping the role of reason, the function of mythical representations is to enclose

knowledge in an uplifting vision. What blocks the perception of mythical thinking acting as a buttress rather than a rival to reason is the stubborn tendency to depict mythical thinking in terms of knowledge.

A little reflection suggests that myth is not knowledge. Wiredu gives a hint when he remarks that myth and science co-exist, that even in the contemporary world, including among scientists, mythical representations resist the impact of rationality. Alluding to the stubborn resistance of religious beliefs, Bergson writes: "experience may indeed say 'that is false,' and reasoning 'that is absurd'. Humanity only clings all the more to that absurdity and that error" (Bergson 1986:102). Had mythical thinking been a form of knowledge, the progress of enlightenment should have entailed the dismissal of religious beliefs, especially among educated people. Seeing to what extent idealist thinking dominates Western philosophy and that those called great philosophers are overwhelmingly idealists, it springs to mind that the major object of philosophy is the defense of religious ideas. It is clear that for Immanuel Kant the purpose of philosophy is to limit science to the phenomenal so that there is room for faith.

The materialist doctrine itself makes sense only as an antithesis, as an attempt to refute idealist positions. A case in point is the Marxist idea of defining philosophy by the conflict between idealism and materialism over the basic question of the primacy of spirit or matter. According to F. Engels: "those who asserted the primacy of spirit to nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other … comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism" (Engels 1959:207).

The stubborn resistance of spiritualist beliefs raises the question of knowing whether mythical thinking does not have a proper function, more exactly, whether the function of the myth is not to counter the representations of reason every time these representations fail to support life. This explanation is the path that Bergson takes when he defines religion as "*a defensive reaction of nature against the dissolvent power of intelligence*" (Bergson 1986: 122). The definition certainly gives a new understanding of the connection between reason and myth. The dissolvent power of intelligence is most apparent in representations connected with the inevitability of death, the appearance of selfishness in a being designed for social life, and the uncertainty of projected actions in a mechanical, unfriendly world. Religious beliefs counter these depressing representations of intelligence through mythical beliefs that paint death as transition to another life, social rules as sacred obligations protected by gods, and mechanical determinism as animated by forces endowed with intentions.

Let me illustrate the role of mythical thinking through a direct confrontation with the Marxist notion of ideology. In *The German Ideology,* Marx uses the context of Germany's technological lag *vis-à-vis* British and French advances to uncover the mode of thinking characteristic of ideology. At a time when British and French philosophical views increasingly assumed earthly contents, those of Germany, Marx notes, remained bogged

down in religious and idealist explanations. A good example is the way Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and the Young Hegelians conceptualize historiography: "while the French and the English at least hold by the political illusion, which is moderately close to reality, the Germans move in the realm of the 'pure spirit,' and make religious illusion the driving force of history" (Marx and Engels 1965: 30). Marx has no doubt that the true explanation for this mythical infatuation lies in the "connection of German philosophy with German reality" (Ibid: 6). In particular, Germany's lag in terms of commerce and industry compels its intellectuals to focus on speculative achievements, and thus to revel in illusions, in events and accomplishments taking place in the realm of pure thought.

This German reaction appears totally inadequate to the requirements of the situation. When a resolute industrialization is the only appropriate response, strange is the German preference for spiritualistic escapades. The production of illusions totally ineffective in dealing with the situation is little intelligible, since the admitted impact of the illusions is to intensify the lag, even to the point of blocking its removal. Insofar as this negative role makes no sense, it requires an explanation that associates the production of beliefs and ideas with the need to respond to a challenging situation. Such an explanation defines mythical thinking less by the tendency to flee reality than by the vocation to support or enhance the resolution to cope with diversity. Instead of opposing mythical thinking to science and rationality, the explanation conceives of them as forming a team.

In light of the disadvantageous reality exposing the industrial lag of Germany, the recourse to mythical thinking to counter the challenging situation is indeed a better explanation than the assumption of a thinking determined to escape from reality, which assumption fails to account for the suitability of the response to the existing situation. The thesis of the complementarity of reason and myth reads into the religious interpretation of history the need to spiritualize economic pursuits for the purpose of both reinstating continuity with German cultural trend and infusing vigor and determination into the industrialization process. The great impact of Hegel's making "the History of the World" into the "process of development and the realization of spirit … the justification of God in history" is the reconciliation of capitalism with religion (Hegel 1956: 457). No better way could be found to attune the German mind to capitalist methods and values than a conception of history greeting modernity with the blessing of religion.

Another influential endorsement of the need to harness knowledge to myth is found in Friedrich Nietzsche's normative characterization of such a bond as the pillar of all viable human civilization. All the more reason for the endorsement to be quite significant is that, dealing specifically with the meaning of the German romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, Nietzsche notes, "the cult of feeling was erected in place of the cult of reason" (Nietzsche 1924: 197). This reference to the romantic cult of feeling

irresistibly evokes Senghor's pronouncements. Nietzsche praises the romantic reaction as a positive phase, as the birth of an autonomous German mind escaping the ascendency of British and French advances.

According to Nietzsche, the preservation of the sense of mystery and transcendence within the routine and techniques of everyday life is a general requisite for the sustenance of civilization, given that the freedom and audacity of the will depend on the maintenance of a line of communication with a fabulous world. What is at stake is the empowering impact of a myth, for as a "concentrated picture of the world … as abbreviature of phenomena," the myth" cannot dispense with wonder" (Nietzsche 1954: 1077). A necessary conclusion follows: since "without myth … every culture loses its healthy creative natural power," the protection of the mythical inspiration is the number one priority of any civilization (Ibid).

For Nietzsche, a pertinent case is again the orientation of German thinking: "Kant and Schopenhauer made it possible for the spirit of *German philosophy* … to destroy scientific Socratism's complacent delight in existence by establishing its boundaries," (Ibid 1059). This necessity to earmark the sense of transcendence shows that the glory and rebirth of a civilization depend on the control of knowledge so that knowledge serves life instead of the opposite. Is not wisdom, the great pursuit of philosophy, the control of knowledge?

When Wiredu notes that Western thinking is not free of mysticism, he should have added that Western thought has produced mystics as has no other culture, as evinced by the sweeping mysticism of the Middle Ages. The great self-deception of ethnophilosophy is to reserve mysticism to Africa while perfectly knowing that Europe reached unsurpassed levels of mysticism, and this deliberate oversight obstructs the assessment of the role that mythical thinking played in the history of the West.

A pertinent example of this role is found in Max Weber's analysis of capitalism. On the strength of the Hegelian spiritualization of history, Weber, a most serious student of economic development, does not hesitate to ascribe the rise of capitalism to a mystical inspiration, to the need to appease the religious anxiety spread by Protestantism. His approach goes beyond reconciling religion with worldly pursuits; it attributes to the religious anxiety the release of such a systematic and insatiable pursuit of worldly success that human beings become "dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of … life" (Weber 1958: 53). If Europe owes the power to colonize the world to a mystical inspiration, then Africans must understand that what colonizes them is less their deficiency in rationality than their repudiation of mythical callings for fear of ratifying the colonial discourse.

THE PARTICULARISM OF FREEDOM

The discovery that mythical thinking has a different function challenges Lucien Levy-Bruhl's evolutionist reading and establishes the complementarity of myth and reason and their equal coexistence in non-Western as well as Western peoples. Does this coexistence mean that no difference exists between Westerners and other peoples? Even though differences are apparent, they do not reside in the way the mind functions. We can say that the progress of science and technology reduces the need for mythical representations among Westerners; we can also add that mythical representations assume an exaggerated role among traditional peoples. Even so, the truth remains that if we take away all acquired habits, the same nature persists in Western and non-Western peoples.

The ethnophilosophical argument according to which the African mind functions differently from the Western mind is not receivable for the simple reason that mythical thinking is not a form of knowledge opposed or different from scientific knowledge. Paulin Hountondji's characterization of mythical thinking as a false, unscientific or pre-scientific knowledge is not receivable for the same reason. As to Mudimbe's position, the fact that the mythical and the scientific do not have the same target justifies their distinction: objective knowledge aims at the control of things, while mythical thinking focuses on beliefs that counter those representations of rationality that depress life. One important lesson follows, namely, the need to keep myth and rationality tied together. The neglect of reason discourages technicalness, and the rejection of mythical thinking kills confidence and belief, without which nothing great can be accomplished.

The colonial discourse is dangerous to Africa not so much by the depreciating intent of the discourse as by the misleading belief that the highest, the most advanced expression of life is rationality. In addition to hiding the mythical foundation of Western thinking, such a belief paints mythical thinking as an expression of backwardness. Acculturated Africans desire nothing less than the complete extirpation of mythical thinking. This one-sidedness, this growth of rationality unsupported by mythical inspiration, takes the sense of wonder away from African thinking. The belief in the immortality of the soul is a good example of what is meant by wonder. To aspire to life beyond the bodily existence, the natural realism of the intellect must be overtaken by a great proclivity for awesome encounters. Without this bent for the extraordinary urging us to assume that life can be more than what it appears to be, life after death would have been unthinkable.

The tendency to censure ideology confirms that awesome inspiration increasingly withers away among Africans. Witness Alpha O. Konare, first elected President of Mali, who recently writes: "Young people no longer believe in ideologies, but they do believe in the values of democracy, justice, work, solidarity" (Addis Tribune 2003: April 18,). This statement evades the question of knowing how the great values of democracy and

justice can crop up in a mind confined to down-to-earth pursuits. The departure of the sense of wonder suppresses the very motivation to undertake great things, to become ambitious and surpass oneself. We see instances of this motivation in matters connected with nation-building and construction of identity. Only when reason is backed by those beliefs that stir up the emotional force of life does it become daring and ambitious. As Bergson states, emotion is the: "source of the great creations of art, of science and of civilization in general.… Not only because emotion is a stimulus, because it incites the intelligence to undertake ventures and the will to preserve them. We must go further. There are emotions which beget thought" (Bergson 1986: 43).

Excess of intellectualism cripples intelligence, and this is exactly the impact of colonial discourse on Africa. The stigmatization of mythical thinking, that is, the association of myth with backwardness, takes the educated African into the exclusive valorization of rationality, which then becomes a tool divorced from belief, and so a source of dissolvent representations. Following different premises Ali Mazrui makes a similar diagnosis of African intellectual impotence when he writes: 'the sense of awe towards the West becomes a foundation for subsequent intellectual dependency" (Mazrui 1978: 313).

Consider the relativist arguments of the deconstructionist school. The enthusiasm for relativist philosophical premises may well be an imprint of mental colonization, given that the relativization of the West as the sole avenue to shake off Eurocentrism leaves the bitter aftertaste of generalized incredulity, not to say cynicism. This outcome reiterates the imperative to accompany the attempt to refute the universalist claim of Euocentrism by a corresponding effort to renew the power to believe. That the dethronement of the West is paid by the risk of being prone to skepticism and cynicism is a major African dilemma whose only antidote is the revival of myth-making consequent upon the disclosure of how closely the rational and the mythical work in tandem.

The revelation of complicity removes the discredit thrown on whatever is not rational. This idea of complicity achieves a higher result than the relativization of the West: it particularizes Eurocentrism without indulging in skepticism. While relativism excludes universalism, particularism grasps difference as a discrete arrangement of the universal. By inserting the universal into a context characterized by a selective and inventive receptivity, it grounds universality on a founding myth, and so particularizes it.

Particularism inaugurates historicity, that is, the creative unfolding of an initial choice, of an original arrangement. The unique and irreplaceable value of the particular lies in this creative originality, which likens identities to works of art. Hence the importance of continuity: it is loyalty to a choice that is unique and inaugural and thanks to which existence assumes a task, defines itself as a moment in the realization of a vision. Moreover, because the idea of collusion between the mythical and the rational underlines the

intervention of choice, it encourages the revival of the power to believe. Nothing is more apt to unleash enthusiasm and instigate belief than the discovery of our freedom: the disclosure of our agency calls on our commitment and paints the world in rosy colors.

If as a result of acquiescing to the colonial discourse, Africa becomes totally overwhelmed by the analytic ascendency of the West to the point of losing the power to believe, this asphyxia, otherwise known as mental colonization, calls for the revalorization of the power to believe. Mazrui appeals for "derationalization," which, he explains, "is from a nationalist point of view, a call for a cultural revival" (Ibid). The irreverent attitude to Western rationality of the negritude thinker appears as a necessary moment: to make up stories and believe in them, people must rise above the objectivist repute of scientific thinking. That is why empowering stories require the act of limiting knowledge, which is then an eminently philosophical task. By diluting all forms of one-sided rationalism and postmodernist skepticism, such a philosophical inquiry fosters a state of mental availability liable to reactivate the myth-making function. Properly understood, the ethnophilosophical project is in keeping with the Kantian purpose of limiting knowledge to make room for belief, provided that the objective is to emancipate the African power to believe from Western objectifications.

This goal of liberation encourages the understanding of the defense of otherness in terms of disengaging the African subject from Western *episteme*. Liberation targets the decolonization of the African mind, a prerequisite to the rekindling of the mythical impulse suppressed by the fascination for Western rationality whose paradox is that it is itself inaccessible without some idealism. Deploring "the complete absence of idealism," Stanislav Andreski notes that "the higher ideals which have inspired those who made Western civilization what it is appear …devoid of any motivating force" to Africans (Andreski 1968: 78).

Though a necessary moment, the attempt of ethnophilosophy to contain the overwhelming ascendency of the West trough the assertion of African otherness is neither sufficient nor free of negative fallouts. There remains the next step, that is, the integration of the objection of professional philosophers. Hence the need for an African philosophy that continues and transcends ethnophilosophy by infusing the desire for rational expressions into the mythical fervor. The defense of particularism, defined as a unique blend of rationality and mysticism, is the best way to realize such a goal.

Of all the main aftermaths of the Western conquest of Africa, the imposition of the cult of rationality as result of which Africans lost the power to believe seems to me the most precious. Recall that this cult is at the root of the endorsement of the unilinear theory of history by which Africans consent to their marginality. Unless the power to believe is liberated, I maintain that Africa cannot have the will to rise above its marginal existence. The attacks against ethnophilosophy express the end product of Westernization essentially manifested by the rise to leadership of

Africans trained in rational thinking unattended by mythical inspiration. Insofar as the training puts the blame for African technological lag on the mythical past, it produces an analytic mind totally alien to the sense of wonder in addition to internalizing colonial stereotypes about Africa.

Though the deconstructionist school attempts to dethrone these stereotypes, the relativist premises of deconstruction theory prevent the recovery of the sense of wonder. To decenter the West so as to recenter Africa, much more than deconstruction is required. Likewise, all those theories advocating Afrocentrism call for something higher than the mere removal of oppression, as shown by the very inspiration of Diop, who changed Egyptian pyramids into Negro testimonies.

Negritude comes close to the sense of wonder, a characteristic example of which is found in Aime' Cesaire's poetic theme of the return to the source. Relativizing the Western glorification of the conquest of nature, the inspiration invested Africa with the unique metaphysical vocation of playing with the world. Unfortunately, negritude thinkers drew back from integrating the rational moment, and so fell short of transforming their vision into reason, into a program of action. They spoke of synthesis with the West, thereby failing to foster a demiurgical orientation from the bosom of negritude itself. Such a synthesis was *per force* devoid of competitive spirit, being but an external linkage with the West. Unable to activate worldliness, the mythical inspiration dried up.

Negritude thinkers would have promoted worldliness, had they consented to lose their blackness so as to recover it in a developed form. In this way, the thinking would have grown into an odyssey, the return to the source being this time the imagined future. The adherence to a descriptive, racially determined notion of negritude, instead of the freely created one, prevented this course of thinking. In surrendering the right to a free definition of negritude, the thinking misses the opportunity of changing the past into a future. For the rewriting of the past in light of present ambitions is how an unfolding subject endowed with the sense of mission moves toward a concocted future.

REFERENCES

Andreski, Stanislav. 1968. *The African Predicament: A Study in the Pathology of Modernization*. New York: Atherton Press.

Bergson, Henri. 1968. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Translated by R. Ashley Andra and Cloudsley Brereton. Notre Dame, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

_____. 1944. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. New York: Random House.

Blyden, Edward, W. 1967. *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Delafosse, Maurice. 1968. *The Negros of Africa*. Translated by F. Fligelman. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press.

Engels, Friedrich. 1959. "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy" in Lewis S. Feuer (ed.) *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*. New York: Anchor Books.

Hegel, Georg, Wilhelm, Friedrich. 1956. *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by J. Sibree. New York: Dover Publications.

Hoselitz, Bert. 1960. *Sociological Aspects of Economic Growth*. Bombay: Vakils, Feffer and Simons Private Ltd.

Long, Norman. 1977. *An Introduction to the Sociology of Rural Development*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Marx, Karl and F. Engels. 1965. *The German Ideology*. Edited by R. Pascal. New York: International Publishers.

Mazrui, Ali, A. 1978. *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa*. Berkeley California: University of California Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1982. *Daybreak*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 1954. "The Birth of Tragedy*,"* Translated by Clifton P. Fadiman, in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*. New York: Random House.

Weber, Max. 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

CHAPTER V

THE RIDDLES OF THE NUMBER NINE
IN *GUJI*-OROMO CULTURE

TADDESSE BERISSO

INTRODUCTION

Numbers play an important role in the day-to-day life of people in almost all cultures of the world. But we know very little about the meaning and use of numbers in local cultures. There remain too few detailed accounts on the application of numbers in the context of culture study. Even anthropologists, for whom every aspect of a culture is a gist for the mill, seem to have disregarded the study of numbers. Reflecting on this fact, Crump writes,

> In anthropology, a faculty library will contain any number of books applying the methods and insights of the discipline to almost any category of human thought or behavior. At the same time, the standard monograph, investigating in detail the daily life of the population up on which it is based, may range equally widely in the choice of the topics dealt with. To all this there is, however, one exception: the use and understanding of numbers. This subject, if not completely disregarded, is treated as no more than marginal, even in cases where numerical factors dominate the day-to-day life of the people being studied. (1990: vii)

It is, therefore, difficult to test effectively what purports to be a general explanation of numbers. The study of numeration systems, symbolic meanings of numbers, mystical beliefs and taboos about numbers, and games having numerical contents are vast and virgin fields awaiting investigation (Zaslavsky 1973). My objective is to deal with only one aspect of numbers, that is, the application of the number nine in *Guji*-Oromo culture not as a counting number but as a number that has special significance. In other words, I concentrate on the number nine entirely from the point of view of its application, and not its being an abstract concept.

In *Guji*-Oromo culture, the number nine is associated with a critical time, with a ghost, and with illness and death. This is clearly evident in *Guji*-Oromo proverbs, in children's games, and in the pregnancy and birth of a ninth child. In this study, after providing an overview about *Guji*-Oromo, I will introduce what I may call "riddles" associated with the number nine in their culture. I will then inquire why nine, among all other numbers, is considered a special number. Finally, an attempt will be made

to disentangle the riddles associated with number nine by employing anthropological models and insights. In doing so, I will examine the powers and limitations of different anthropological theories in explaining the "riddles" associated with the number nine. The essay is an exercise in philosophy of anthropology.

GUJI-OROMO: AN OVERVIEW

The *Guji*-Oromo (also known as Jam *Jam* or *Jam Jamtu* by some of their neighbors) are one of the many groups of the Oromo people. They live predominantly in the *Borana* Zone of Oromiyaa Region, Southern Ethiopia. They speak *Afaan* Oromo, one of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia, belonging to the Eastern Cushitic language family. The *Guji* have a population of about one million people with an average density of 35 persons per sq km. They were conquered and incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire in 1896 by the forces of Menilik II (1889-1913). Outside of the Oromiyaa Region, small pockets of *Guji* population currently live in the *Wando-Gannat* area and in the *Nac-Sar* Park of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region of Ethiopia.

Unlike some other Oromo groups that constitute a single section, the *Guji* are a confederation of three independent, but closely related, groups known as *Uraga*, *Mati* and *Hoku.* Traditionally, each section had its own territorial boundary and political leader in the form of Abba *Gadaa* 'an age-grade leader'. However, the three groups are interdependent: they regard each other as tied by blood relations, act together in cases of war against neighboring groups, help each other during economic crisis, and conduct *Gadaa* rituals together. Intermarriage is fairly common, and there are few cultural differences among them. Indeed, individuals or families from one group could move and settle in the other's territory.

The traditional socio-political organization of *Guji* society is dominated by moiety-clan-lineage-family structure and by the *Gadaa* system, with *Qaalluu* 'supreme hereditary religious leader' at the apex. There are two non-exogamous moieties, known as *Kontoma* and *Darimu* that cut across the three groups. Under these moieties, there are seven non-totemic and exogamous clans in *Uraga* and *Hoku* each, and three in *Mati*. Each clan is divided into a variable number of segments called *mana*, literally 'house', which in turn are divided into a great number of patrilineages. The *Guji* family is an extended patriarchal family. Marriage is based, in most cases, on self-selection and on arrangement between the families of the bride and the groom. Polygyny, primogeniture, patrilocal residence and levirate are some other features of the *Guji* marriage and family system.

Gadaa is an age-grade system that divides the stages of life of individuals, from childhood to old age, into a series of formal steps. There are thirteen such steps in the contemporary *Guji* society. Transition ceremonies mark the passage from one stage to the next. Within each stage,

activities and social roles are formally defined, both in terms of what is permitted and what is forbidden. The ideal length of time in one rank is eight years. In the past, the *Gadaa* system assumed military, economic, legal and arbitrational responsibilities. In recent years, however, the function of the *Gadaa* system in *Guji* has been reduced to ritual activities.

The *Guji* have a mixed economy of animal husbandry and crop cultivation in a fertile land that stretches over a wide variety of altitudes. They subsist mainly by growing grains such as barley, corn, and *teff* (*eragrostis ef*), pulses and *enset (musa ensete)*. But their real wealth consists of cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. Emotions and pride are centered in stock. People who do not own cattle are not considered to be proper *Guji*. (Baxter 1991: 9). Cattle are important, not only for economic purposes, but also for social and ritual life. The social status of a person among the *Guji* finds its expression in the number of cattle owned. The owner of many heads of cattle is a respected person. Cattle are ritually used for sacrificial purposes.

With regard to religion, the *Guji* have developed a very complex set of beliefs and practices. They believe in *Waaqa* 'heaven' and in the existence of *durissa* 'devil'. They have Woyyu 'sacred shrines' under which prayers and sacrifices are made to *Waaqa*. They also believe in ritual power vested on certain individuals and families, The *Qaalluu* 'supreme religious leader' and *Abbaa Gadaa*, who are respectively, considered as woyyu 'holy' and *Warra Qallaca* 'virile family, are among these individuals. Attached to these are rituals and religious practices, such as oracle, sprit possession, complex and varied divinations, and other traditional beliefs. But with the introduction of the great religious and modern civilization, *Guji* traditional beliefs are changing fast. There has been a mass conversion of *Guji* farmers into Christianity (Protestantism in particular) and Islam specially, after the 1974 Ethiopian Socialist Revolution (Taddesse 1995).

The *Guji* consider their homeland to be the very ancestral cradle of the Oromo culture. Indeed many scholars have now, on the bases of historical linguistics, oral traditions and cultural data, concluded that the Oromo originated in and around the areas currently inhabited by the *Guji, Borana* and *Arsi* Oromo (Haberland 1963; Lewis 1966; Asmarom 1973). From these areas, the Oromo launched their vast expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the basis of the *Gadaa* organization. It is only the *Borana* and *Guji* who have kept alive the *Gadaa* system and the associated ceremonies, with their relatively original features. In general, the traditional order still functions, making the *Guji-Borana* area the spiritual and cultural center of the Oromo .The riddles associated with number nine are other cultural traditions retained in this area by the *Guji-Oromo*.

RIDDLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE NUMBER NINE

In *Guji*-Oromo culture, as in many cultures, there are taboos and mystical belief about numbers. There are also numbers that have symbolic

significance. For instance, there is a belief among the *Guji*-Oromo that the counting of human beings and domestic animals will lead to their destruction. To circumvent the taboo, they identify their livestock individually by name. What was observed by (Asmarom 1973: 281) about the *Borana*-Oromo is equally true for the *Guji*. According to him, each animal is a unique creature with a different color, shape, pedigree, name, and life history. Cattle are to the herdsman as books are to the academic. The herdsman recalls not only how he acquired the animal, but often the specific and emotionally tinged circumstances of acquisition.

For human beings too, counting is done indirectly. For example, instead of saying "I have eight children (from a wife)" one may say, "After one more child I will celebrate *sallii-falla*." a ceremony held for the pregnancy and birth of a ninth child (see below). The indirect counting of human beings may have created confusion to official enumerators, and contributed to the underestimation of the *Guji* population during census counts. Besides this, there is a tradition of dual grouping of clans into masculine four and feminine three; number four being a symbol for the masculine principle, and three for the feminine principle (Haberland: 1963: 775).

Moreover, there are numbers that are associated with mystical belief and the world-view of the *Guji*-Oromo. These include the number nine itself (to be discussed later) and *kumaa* 'one thousand'. *Kumaa* is generally used in *Guji* to symbolize the highest number' even though their counting system extends far beyond this figure. Traditionally' if two hundred heifers gave birth to calves in two consecutive years, that is one hundred calves each year, the owner would have the right of holding a *kumaa gatee* discarding the 1000th ceremony. During this ceremony one of these heifers would firmly be tied and taken to a forest where it would be left as an offering to wild beasts. This was symbolically an indication that the man had reached the ultimate level of herd development, for which he would be widely known. The ceremony also indicates the desire of the *Guji* to keep a large number of cattle. Besides this, it was a *Guji* tradition to require a thousand heads of cattle for *gumaa* 'compensation for homicide' although the actual amount may not have exceeded one hundred.

There are also a number of dichotomies in *Guji*-Oromo culture, such as even and odd numbers, right and left, male and female and up and down. The former in each pair is associated with auspicious phenomena or events, while the latter is associated with inauspicious phenomena. As a whole, all odd numbers are bad, and things associated with them are considered undesirable. To remove or control inauspicious events associated with them, a *Guji* may engage in prayers and make sacrifices or he may postpone the desired activity. And there are no riddles associated with these dichotomies as such.

But there are instances, in *Guji*-Oromo culture, in which odd numbers like nine are singled out and associated with different kinds of inauspicious

phenomena. The first riddle about number nine is one that associates it with a critical time or moment. This is evident in the proverb,

Gaalie Sagali bulle   'A camel that survived the ninth day would
Kudhan bullu hindadhabu   survive the tenth'

The *Guji* share this proverb with the *Borana*-Oromo and most probably with other pastoralists, such as the *Garri* and the Somali. In the proverb, the number nine (or the ninth day) is considered as the most critical time, which could bring about misfortune or death to the individual or family concerned. Symbolically, it represents a time between life and death. The proverb also indicates, ironically, the importance of patience and the need for delaying present gratification for future satisfaction. In both cases nine represents a critical moment that one has to pass through if one is to be successful in life. A camel that has survived nine days (without water?) is very strong!

The following is another *Guji* proverb that associates number nine with a critical time or moment.

Haluun dhirra wagaaa sagalti bati.   'No matter how it may be delayed,
                                                               revenge for a man killed by
                                                               enemy should be taken within
                                                               nine years.'

Another riddle associated with the number nine is related to children's game. For most *Guji*, particularly for the children, evenings are time for story telling, and for playing different kinds of games, while sitting around the hearth. The games played by the children are many and varied, but include: *wani duri,* story telling usually by the elderly legends that illustrate the proper behavior and values of the group; *hibboo* or 'puzzles'; *dhukee*[3] or manner of imitation;' reckoning genealogical relations or *kolfe- kolfi-serra;* and counting. Among these, it is the counting game which is related to the second riddle of number nine.

The game is usually led by an elderly person who tests how fast and accurately a child can tell and count back all the things that are associated with each number. The game goes like this:

An elderly person would ask and a child would answer:

Takko mali?   'What is one?'
Tokko kubba/kubbele   'One is a finger/ a ring.'
Lemaa mali?   'What is two?'
Lamma mucha ree, tokko kubba   'Two are the teats of a goat and
                                                       one is a finger'

Sadi mali?	'what is three?'
Sadi sunsuma aayya,	'Three are Mum's hearth stones;
lama mucha ree, tokko kubba	two are teats of a goat, and one is a finger'

In this way, children are tested as to how fast and accurately they can count all the numbers from one to ten, and all multiples of ten to one hundred. All the numbers included in the game and the things associated with each are recorded in Oromo as follows:

Tokko-kubba/kubbele	'One – is a finger/ a ring'
Lamma – mucha ree	'Two – are teats of a goat'
Saddi – sunsuma aayya	'Three – are Mum's hearth stones'
Afur – mucha sayya	'Four – are teats of a cow'
Shan – kubba harkka	'Five – are fingers of a hand'
Jahaa – jabbii karaxaa	'Six – are bride-wealth cattle'
Torbaa – bussa waka	'Seven – are stars in the constellation of ursa major'
Saddeet – dhalla saree	'Eight – are litters of a bitch'
Sagli – lakkossa ekerra	'Nine – is count of a ghost'
Kudhan – kuttata dula	'Ten – is a military regiment'
Digdama – bolla sadeqqa	'Twenty – are holes in a game board'
Soddoma – qabbido Soddaa	'Thirty – is the number of days given as appointment to in-laws
Afurtama – kurnya afurii	'Forty – is four times ten'
Shantama – wolaka dhibba	'fifty – is half of a hundred'
Jaattama – kurna jahaa	'Sixty – is six times ten'
Torbatama – kurnyatorba	'Seventy – is seven times ten'
Saddetama – dame kilxxuu	'Eighty – is the number of branches of a kilxxuu tree'
Sagalitama – kurrya sagalii	'Ninety – is nine times ten'
Dhibba – ganka lakkobisa	'Hundred – is end of a count'

The counting game enables the children to learn a lot about their culture and things in their environment by association. Such a game is important in developing the children's ability to speak and to sharpen their mental capacity. The game also has educational value in passing tradition from generation to generation. In general, it is one of the most efficient and effective ways of teaching children in places where writing is not yet developed.

In this game, it is interesting to note that the number nine is associated with ghosts. The *Guji* do not believe in life after death, and, therefore, do not worship ancestors. They do however, believe in the existence of *ekerra*, a soul of dead person wandering in wilderness for a short period of time.

Ekerra is feared because it is said to be dangerous to the living. It is usually associated with danger, with illness that reduces people to skeletons, and with death.

The pregnancy and birth of a ninth child is another riddle associated with the number nine. In *Guji*-Oromo culture, the pregnancy and birth of a ninth child is considered important, but at the same time problematic. It is important because it qualifies a family to hold a major ceremony, recognizing procreation on the part of a man and parturition on the part of a woman as meritorious actions. After this ceremony, the husband and his wife will become honored guests of the *sallii falla* or 'sacrifice for pregnancy and birth of a ninth child.' It is considered problematic because the pregnancy and birth of a ninth child is believed to bring misfortune to the family concerned.

In *Guji*, as in societies all over the world, one of the main purposes of marriage is to beget children who continue the family. There is a belief among the *Guji* that the "remedy against death" is to have children to replace parents. Traditionally, giving birth to a baby on the part of a woman is considered to be equal to the merit, on the part of a man, of killing an enemy or a big game animal (lion, elephant, buffalo or rhinoceros), both status-conferring and honorable activities.[6]

Couples with children are considered fortunate, and blessed, while the opposite holds true for childless couples. The desire to have children after marriage is so strong that childless couples try all sorts of fertility rituals to get children. In fact, most *Guji* rituals are fertility rituals. If these do not work, they look for other means such as forming a *garayyu*[7] or 'mistress-lover relationship', adoption, and recently a shift from one religious belief to another in the hope of begetting children. There are many other practical reasons why the *Guji* want to have as many children as nature allows. Children are considered as assets which ensure the social security of parents. Children are the major labor force of the family and have the responsibility of supporting their parents during old age and ill-health. Children are believed to cement the relationship of the couple and thus strengthen the family. In places where modern health facilities are hardly accessible, producing as many children as possible is a guarantee against high infant mortality and child death. Besides, men who have many children gain high status and importance that will enable them to take part in ritual, legal and social activities of their community. These seem to be some of the reasons why, among the *Guji* the birth of a child creates an opportunity for a family to make gift exchanges, to conduct *maqibassa* 'name – giving ceremonies' and to qualify to possess certain ceremonial objects or ornaments.

Despite the importance of children in the *Guji* society and the universal desire to have many children after marriage, the pregnancy of a ninth child brings fear and anxiety to the family concerned. To avoid the danger or misfortune associated with the pregnancy of the ninth child, *sallii falla* 'sacrifice for pregnancy and birth of the ninth child' is offered.

When a woman is in her ninth month of the pregnancy of her ninth child, spouses (usually four pairs) who have already fathered their own ninth child are invited to sacrifice *dullaca* 'an old cow' (Van De Loo 1991: 94). The host family also prepares a large quantity of milk and *dadhi bokka* 'home-made honey wine' with which prayers and blessings are said for them. During the sacrifice, the invited men chant *haririti* [8] prayer in which they say *Sallii tannani nu bulici*, 'May we live with this ninth child'. Then they rub with the blood the forehead of the father and breasts and neck of the mother, saying, *Sallii tana wollini bulla olla*, 'May God help you to live with this ninth child'.

The milk will be served to all guests, while blessings and prayers are said for the couple. Finally the guests symbolically wash the couple with *malxuu* 'blessing by throwing puffs of *dadhi-bokka* ' homemade honey wine' on them. This is a symbol of washing away all dangers that are believed to result from the pregnancy of a ninth child. In other words, they pray and make sacrifices to ensure that their god *(Waaqa)* intervenes favorably in their lives.

Another feature of the *sallii falla* ritual is that every ninth-born child (male or female) is given the same name, *Sallii* throughout the *Guji* country. Thus, when one comes across this name, one can easily understand that the person is a ninth child.

The second *sallii falla* ritual is celebrated when a woman is to have her eighteenth child. Should the *sallii falla* ceremony be ignored, it is believed that either the mother or the child will become seriously ill or die. Even if by chance, a woman gives birth to her ninth child without any problem it is believed that the child will not become a useful member of the family and the society at large. In general, the pregnancy and birth of her ninth child is believed to bring some misfortune and bad luck to the family unless protected by the *sallii falla* ceremony.

To sum up, in *Guji*-Oromo culture number nine is associated with a critical time, with a ghost/danger, and with illness and death. Nine is considered a special number, and the danger or bad luck associated with it is believed to be averted through rituals such as prayers, sacrifices and *malxuu* 'blessing by means of puffing out home-made honey wine'. This leads to the question of why a number, the most abstract of human concepts, has such an emotional association? Why is it that number nine, among all other numbers, is considered as a special number among the *Guji*? How are we to explain the riddles associated with it?

INTERPRETING THE RIDDLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE NUMBER NINE

Guji-Oromo culture is not unique in associating danger, bad luck and misfortune with a particular number. Lucky and unlucky numbers are found in many societies, though no such a single number has any universal significance. In America and much of Europe, for example, number thirteen

is associated with bad luck, and many buildings skip "thirteen" in numbering the floors. According to Hallpike (1972: 278), nine was considered to be a bad number in *Konso*. It was especially associated with the death of a man. Asmarom's (1973: 198) informant told him how the *Borana* – Oromo dislike everything that happened in nines[9.]

In contrast to such numbers, there are certain others that are held sacred and important. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, for instance, four occupies a principal position. According to Zaslavsky (1973: 213) we find that a four-day week is traditional. Each day is dedicated to one of the four major deities, or its local counterparts. "The world has four corners" is a widespread Yoruba expression. Similarly, the approach to earth from the outer world is through four gates. This image is carried out in the four gates of the walls of each town. In his study of *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer*, Evans-Pritchard (1951) also noted that forty was the "ideal number of cattle to be given in bride-wealth, but he never thought to ask why forty, and not some other number. This neglect to the meaning of numbers is quite common, even in cases where numerical factors dominate the day-to-day life of people being studied (Crump, 1990: viii).

Some scholars claimed that the patterns of thought of primitive peoples were"mystical" rather than logical, and therefore could not be explained scientifically. Haberland's (1963: 777) comment on the Oromo counting system is a good example. Having studied the southern Oromo groups, which include the *Guji, Borana* and *Arsi*, he held the view that since the Oromo culture is "primitive" and "simple", they have spiritual rather than scientific attitudes toward numeration generally, as evidenced by their dislike or sanctifying of certain numbers; their religion prohibits them from counting their livestock; and they are unable to count their ages in years. Hence, he assumes that the Oromo lack the basic intellectual skills and attitudes necessary to invent an advanced institution such as the *Gadaa* system. Therefore, they must, he assumes, have borrowed it from a higher civilized culture.

It is beyond the scope of this study to pursue the origin of the *Gadaa* system here[10.] But my own interview of *Guji* informants and Asmarom's findings among the *Borana*-Oromo show that most *Guji-Borana* are able to tell age in years. Besides, the fact that the Oromo dislike certain numbers, or have counting taboos is not an indication that they lack the ability to employ a statistical mode of thought in domains that are not connected with their numerical taboo (Legesse 1973: 280). For that matter, many world cultures (including American and European) that have reached high numerical sophistication show dislike for certain numbers, as discussed above.

Haberland, however, failing to understand how the Oromo counting system works at various levels for a variety of things, says "They [the Oromo] attach magical significance to numbers" (1963:777.) For him, it is unworthy to study the application of this "magic" to the life of people since it emanates from the pre-logical mentality of a "lower society" (1963:777).

It was in relation to this view, that (Legesse 1973: 180) responded with the polemical statement ,"If the ethnographer fails to understand a particular system of thought, he accuses his informants of "magical thought", or of pre-logical childlike mental operations, rather than admitting that his data are inadequate and his understanding limited." From this, it is clear that when some scholars fail to understand certain systems of thought of pre-industrial societies, they blame their subjects either for having a pre-logical thought or for borrowing them from the "civilized" West. This is an ethnocentric approach which helps us neither to understand the cultures of "others" nor to explain why people behave the way they do.

Marvin Harris (1974), a prominent American anthropologist, offers solutions to a number of perplexing questions of why people behave the way they do. He raised a number of riddles such as: Why do Hindus worship cows? Why do Jews and Moslems refuse to eat pork? Why did so many people in post-medieval Europe believe in witches? And why have witches managed to stage such a successful comeback in today's popular culture? Harris supplies some seemingly sensible, down-to-earth explanations to these questions. He clearly demonstrates that no matter how bizarre a people's behavior may seem, it always stems from identifiable and intelligible causes.

To explain different patterns of culture, he employed a cultural materialism approach which is based on the premise that,

> Human life is not merely random or capricious. Without this assumption, the temptation to give up when confronted with a stubbornly inscrutable custom or institution soon proves irresistible. Over the years I have discovered that life styles which others claimed were totally inscrutable actually had definite and readily intelligible causes. The main reason why these causes have been so long overlooked is that everyone is convinced that "only God knows the answer" (Harris 1974: 2)

Harris argues that human behavior could be understood and objectively explained no matter how "irrational" or "bizarre" it may seem at first glance. But, he attempted to explain most culture forms and practices from the point of view of practical utility or from a rationalist-materialist point of view. He like those who adopt this theoretical position argues that customs or institutions are not simply random practices, but are responses to genuine needs in the life of a society. This is most frequently expressed with statements that allude to cultural practices "functions," or, alternatively, as a part of a society's "adaptation" to environmental circumstances (Barrett 1991: 78). Consequently, the task of interpreting a custom involves searching for the function the practice serves within the society or deciphering the role it plays in adjusting the society to its environment.

From this perspective, the answer to the riddles associated with number nine should be sought in the practical functions that this custom provides the *Guji* in their adaptation to their environment. But the association of number nine with a critical time, ghost, illness or death does not have any direct practical or utilitarian value to the *Guji* in their adaptation to the environment. There is simply too much in human behavior and culture that cannot be explained in such terms. Some cultural practices or customs could be neutral, inefficient, or even mal-adaptive in societies' adaptation to environment.

Sahlins (1976) argues that culture must be explained in terms of culture, that it must have a right to exist in its own. But this argument was highly criticized as it entails the fruitless assumption that culture comes from culture. How can we then make sense out of the riddles associated with number nine in the *Guji*-Oromo culture?

Views from inside the culture are of no help to solve the riddles. All *Guji* informants I interviewed do not exactly know why the number nine is associated with a critical time, with a ghost, and with illness and death in their culture. They simply say, "It is the way of our ancestors," "It is our tradition" or "it is always like that." Indeed they do not bother with it and only some of them know about the association of the number with all the phenomena mentioned. Thus I was unable to find a satisfactory interpretation of the riddles from the "native" point of view, (Barrett, 1991: 133) rightly says,"There are many things about a society, and about their own behavior in it, that most individuals simply do not understand. This is because many human actions are of a traditionalist, rote kind; they are engaged in because the individuals have been taught to perform them, and not because they know the specific reasons behind their actions."

Another way of looking at the matter was suggested by a colleague.[1] In counting, people often use their fingers. If they do so, the key numbers are almost inevitably five, that is, the number of fingers on one hand, or ten, those on both hands. From this, it follows that the critical numbers needed to reach these two key numbers, and so to speak of completion, are those immediately preceding them. That is, numbers four and nine respectively.

Since two hands are more important than one, it follows that number nine is likewise more important than number four. But, since four is an even number, it cannot denote evil. In contrast, nine is an odd number, and is, therefore, evil. Indeed it is the highest, and, one many presume, the most evil of all the odd, or even numbers. Nine, thus, becomes, in a sense, the king of evils, or odd numbers.

This interpretation, while very important, has one major limitation. It ignores the positive aspects of number nine in *Guji*-Oromo culture. It is true

---

[1] I am indebted to Professor Richard Pankhurst of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies for suggesting this alternative interpretation about the riddles associated with number nine.

that nine is associated with a critical moment; and believed to bring about misfortune, danger and death. Hence it is disliked. But at the same time, nine is a marker of honor in *Guji* culture. It qualifies a family to hold a major ritual and to attend, as a guest of honor, the *sallii falla* rituals of others in their community, as mentioned earlier. My *Borana* friend also informed me that when the *Borana* talk about *tula saglan (sagali)* 'the nine wells of the *Borana*', they are talking about the deepest and the most permanent wells that serve them throughout the dry seasons. The *tula saglan* are not only economically significant but are also associated with a special power, indicating the importance, or positive aspects, of the number nine. Besides this, nine has a positive sense when a *Borana* says, *saglan Borana sagaltama garbba* 'nine *Borana* to ninety slaves'.

The interpretation of the riddles associated with the number nine thus calls for an in-depth analysis of the traditional Oromo concept of numbers, and analysis of the patterns and relations in their culture. By assuming a broader perspective than that of any of the participants and by discovering how one institution fits another, anthropologists are able to perceive connections and meanings that are not obvious to the members of a society (Barrett 1991: 138-139).

To understand the Oromo concept of numbers in general, and to interpret the riddles associated with number nine among the *Guji* Oromo in particular, it is important to examine the underlying principle of the entire traditional counting system of the Oromo on which there is hardly any extensive study. Gemetchu's (1993) attempt to analyze the meaning and role of numbers in Oromo thought and culture is a pioneering work. According to him and my *Guji* informants, in the traditional Oromo counting system, there are only nine "true" counting numbers, lakkobssa dhugga. These are the digital numbers one to nine. All the other numbers are said to be a reproduction of this series and can be repeated infinitively. This repetition is called *mara*, 'round', or 'return', and represents the zero concept.

Kassam explained this cycle and its significance in Oromo culture as follows:

> … there are therefore eight steps involved. Before another cycle can begin, there is an intermediary, transition period, a sort of void. This gap, which is empty but at the same time full, is represented by number nine, standing for the zero concept. It makes a critical turning point, in which the new cycle arises out of the ashes of the old. These cycles vary   in complexity and danger, but at each turn in the wheel of time, a certain amount of evil overspills and is accumulated in the entire system, such that, at certain point, in order for regeneration to take place, something has to be "cut off" or sacrificed and disappear from the original structure(1994: 36).

The number nine, therefore, brings to a close the series of 'true' counting numbers, representing both the end of a process, and the beginning of a new one at another level. It is a transition between an end and a new beginning, which is often marked by a rite of passage ceremony in Oromo culture – involving sacrifices, prayers, *malxuu* 'blessing by means of puffing out home-made honey wine', and other rituals.

The analysis of the rite of passage rituals was first articulated by Gennep (1960) who divided them into sequential phases. The phases consist of preliminal (the separation from a previous status), liminal (the time of statuslessness transition), and postliminal (reintegration into a new status). The liminal phase is the most important one in all the rites which are found throughout the world, but tend to reach their maximal expression in small-scale and relatively stable societies, such as the *Guji*. In *Guji*, besides birth, marriage, and death, there are other transition rite rituals which include *Gadaa*-grade transition, the *sallii falla* and the first fruit harvest ceremonies. In fact, as clearly shown by Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967,1969), rites of passage are not confined to culturally designed life crises, but may accompany any change from one state to another, as when a whole tribe goes to war, or when it attests to the passage from scarcity to plenty by performing a first-fruit or harvest feast. More generally, a rite of passage may mark any change in place, condition, and social position, or age.

Following Gennep's initial insight, Turner (1969) demonstrated that rites of passage, particularly the liminal phase, always have certain important characteristics. The"transitional beings," or the subjects of liminal ritual, are in interstructural situation, symbolically invisible, ritually polluting, ambiguous and neutral. They are neither one thing nor another, nor both; or neither here nor there; nor even anywhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very last "betwixt and between" all the recognized fixed points in space-time structural classification (Turner ,1967).

From the discussion so far, it seems clear that the *Guji* associate number nine with a critical moment, a ghost/danger, and with illness and death, because this number marks a transitional state. Like all other transitional states (subjects), nine is in an interstructural situation in betwixt and between, and therefore, ritually polluting. It is in an interstructural situation because it represents the void or time-out-of-time concept in which the new cycle of counting arises from the old, at a different level. It is also a time during which a society or its parts encounter, celebrate, and reaffirm their crucial social values.

At this point, it is interesting to note that ekerra 'ghost' which is associated with number nine, is in itself a transitional state. It is no life, no death, neither here nor there, betwixt and between, a state of liminality, suspension – exactly like nine in the numbering system. Like all other liminal states, nine is also regarded as polluting in *Guji* society. The whole purpose of conducting the *sallii falla* ceremony is to purify a couple from

the pollution they have entered into with the pregnancy of a ninth child, whose birth is considered to be dangerous for the family and society at large. The sacrifice of *dulaca*, 'an old cow', and *malxuu* are, therefore, held as ritual means of averting dangers of the interstructural situation. Inauspicious things are sometimes ritually transferred to animals that are then slaughtered to create consistence out of inconsistency.

CONCLUSION

The importance of a theoretical approach in understanding a given culture or practice is made clear in the discussion. Two theoretical approaches are reflected in this study. One is ethnocentric and supremacist, rooted in the theory of evolution/diffusion which assumes that pre-industrial societies are "primitive," "simple" and have "pre-logical" and "childlike" mentality. Their thoughts and institutions are assumed to present no challenge to the "logical" minds of Western scholars. If complex institutions, such as the Oromo *Gadda*, are discovered in "primitive" societies, it is understood that they are borrowed from "civilized" culture. This theoretical approach, as represented, for example, in Haberland (1963) is not only reductionist, but also unproductive, and inadequate in the face of the staggeringly rich and complex human knowledge and experience.

The other theoretical approach is consistent with the development of scientific tools that can help us minimize ethnocentric bias. Both functionalist/ecological and symbolic/interpretive approaches come under this category. The extent to which each of these approaches adequately explains a certain issue depends on the issue itself, on the kind of information obtained, and on socio-political interests, among others.

I cannot claim that I have found a completely satisfactory solution to the riddles of the number nine. But I believe that the riddles cannot be adequately comprehended by means of evolutionary or adaptation theories. The interpretation of the riddles requires a good understanding of the patterns and relations of the *Guji* culture, the traditional meanings, the use of numbers in the *Guji* world view, and the "latent underlying, form" of their custom/practice. The "latent" is that which is neither apparent on the surface of things, nor a part of a conscious awareness of the members of the society (Evans-Pritchard, 1962; 52; Barrett, 1991:42). In such a situation, an interpretive/symbolic approach seems to provide a setting for a better understanding of the riddles.

NOTES

[1]The field research in *Guji*-Oromo land on which this study is based was conducted during the summer of 1996.

[2] See Hinnant (1977) for a detailed study of the *Guji Gadaa* system.

[3]This is a game, in which members of the household divide themselves into equal groups, positioning themselves usually on different sides of the

hearth. They then twist their fingers and toes in turn to make a "K" sound that would be carefully counted to determine the winning side.

[4]In this game a person tries to make a member of a household laugh using any means, while the other person desists from laughing.

[5]This seems simply to indicate how big a *kilxxuu* tree is in terms of the number of its branches.

[6]See Bartels (1969) for a similar view among the *Macha*-Oromo.

[7]The *garayyu* relationship in *Guji* is highly institutionalized and goes far beyond a sexual liaison. A child born of this relationship belongs to the legal spouse. The relationship thus helps to overcome problems arising from male infertility.

[8]Haririti is making a supplication while placing hands or ritual sticks on the back of a sacrificial animal.

[9]Since similar attitudes to number nine are found in *Guji*, *Borana* and *Konso*, it is interesting to know how far this cultural value is found among other Cushitic or other neighboring groups.

[10]Asmarom (1973), Tessema (1986), and others have clearly demonstrated that *Gadaa* is definitely an Oromo institution.

REFERENCES

Legesse, Asmarom. 1973. *Gada: There Approaches to the Study of African Society.* New York: The Free Press.

Barrett, R. 1991. *Culture and Conduct: An Excursion in Anthropology.* Second Edition. Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing.

Bartels, L. 1969."Birth Songs of the Macha Galla." In *Ethnology* 8 (4): 406-422.

Baxter, P.T.W. 1991. "Preface." In Joseph Van De Loo, *Guji Oromo Culture in Southern Ethiopia: Religious Capabilities in Rituals and Songs*. Berlin, pp .9-13

Crump, Thomas. 1990. *The Anthropology of Numbers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1951. *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____.1962. *Essays in Social Anthropology*. New York: The Free Press.

Gemetchu Megerssa. 1993. "Identity, Knowledge and the Colonizing Structure." Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies.

Gennep, A. Van. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Haberland, E. 1963. *Galla sud-Ethiopiens*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag.

Hallpike, C.R. 1972. *The Konso of Ethiopia: A Study of the Values of a Cushitic People.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harris, Marvin. 1974. *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*. New York: Vintage Books.

Hinnant T. John. 1977. "The Gada System of the Guji of Southern Ethiopia." Ph.D Dissertation, University of Chicago.

Kassam, Anessa. 1994. "The Oromo Theory of Development" In Eghosa Osaghee (eds.) *Between State and Civil Society in Africa*. CODDESIRA Book Series. pp 16-39.

Lewis. H. S. 1966. "The Origins of the Gala and Somali" In *Journal of African History*. Vol. VII, pp. 27-46.

Sahlins, M.D. 1976. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Taddesse Berisso. 1995. "Agricultural and Rural Development Polices in Ethiopia: A Case Study of Villagization Policy among the Guji-Oromo of Jam Jam Awraja. "Ph. D. Dissertation, Michigan State University.

Tesssema Ta'a. 1986. "The political Economy of Western Central Ethiopia: From the Mid-16th to the Early-20th Centuries. "Ph. D. Dissertation, Michigan State University.

Turner, Victor. 1967. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage. " In V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press   pp.93-111.

_____.1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.

Van De Loo Joseph. 1991. *Guji Oromo Culture in Southern Ethiopia. Religious Capabilities in Rituals and Songs*. Berlin: Dietrich Reiner Verlag.

Zaslavsky, Claudia. 1973. *Africa Counts: Number and Pattern in African Culture.* Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill and Company.

SAGE PHILOSOPHY, RATIONALITY AND SCIENCE: THE CASE OF ETHIOPIA

CHARLES C. VERHAREN

> ... all of Africa and its numerous inhabitants, as remarkable in character as they are in color, still remain to be studied; the whole earth is covered with Nations of which we know only the names, and yet we pretend to judge mankind! Rousseau, *First Discourse*

> "Don't Think. Look." Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*

INTRODUCTION

This essay uses contemporary philosophy in Ethiopia as a case study to examine the practical status of sage philosophy and its connections to rationality and science. Centering on the rich history of research produced in Addis Ababa University's Department of Philosophy, the essay commences with Messay Kebede's views on these issues. A former Chair of the Department, he now serves on the philosophy faculty at the University of Dayton in Ohio. Messay's position has changed markedly over time. (The essay follows the Ethiopian custom of referring to a person by given name rather than patronymic.) A survey of his research illustrates a remarkable correlation between philosophy and culture. His early research views philosophy as an aid only to science – any other use of philosophy is myth. His later research valorizes myth as a galvanizing force in the service of rationality.

The essay's second section criticizes Messay's radical separation of myth and rationality. If rationality is the process of setting and achieving goals through reason, feeling and imagination, then philosophy's task within rationality is to furnish the foundational goals that direct our lives and to revise those goals when necessary. Philosophy and science are both integral parts of rationality's whole. They are separable only by their degrees of generalization. At its cutting edge, science is philosophy. But philosophy aims at such heights of generalization that its directives are not subject to verification. Hence philosophical guidelines have the character of myth, in the original Greek sense of *muthos,* a likely or plausible story. This section's conclusion considers whether myths can be separated from one another by their degree of plausibility.

The essay's third section considers Messay's proposals for the conduct of philosophy in Africa. Rejecting the methods of African philosophers such as Hountondji, Mudimbe, Appiah, and Wiredu, Messay turns to Henri

Bergson, the subject of his Ph.D. dissertation at Grenoble, for inspiration. With Bergson, Messay claims that "galvanizing" myths must drive rationality in appropriate directions. One role of such myths is to ensure that rationality is not given undue emphasis. Messay turns to a "deracialized" Negritude and Afrocentrism (from Leopold Senghor and Cheikh Anta Diop) for a syncretic galvanizing myth appropriate to Africa's current circumstances.

After criticizing Messay's methods for generating viable myths for Africa, the essay's fourth section turns to Claude Sumner's research on literate and oral philosophical traditions in Ethiopia. Sumner's methodology moves from external influences on Ethiopian written philosophy (Indian, Persian, Arabian, Greek, for example) to the worldviews of the indigenous Oromo cultures in Southern, Eastern, and Western Ethiopia.

Sumner characterizes his research as "sapiential literature" (Sumner 1995:23) rather than sage philosophy in the sense of Odera Oruka (1997), whose method relies on dialogical interviews. Sumner's virtue is to employ the services of anthropologists and linguists in producing his wisdom literature. The conclusion of this section proposes a conflation of Sumner and Oruka's methods that requires collaboration between anthropologists and philosophers.

The essay's conclusion proposes a research program that synthesizes the work of Addis Ababa University anthropologist Gemetchu Megerssa and Sumner. Gemetchu argues that Oromo culture derives from an earlier Cushitic culture that stretched from Africa to India three thousand years ago, with connections to Ancient Egyptian culture (Gemetchu 1995: 11-12; Kassam 1995: 10). His hypothesis suggests possible links between Oromo and ancient Egyptian philosophy. Sumner's research can be used to compare the 17th century Ethiopian philosopher Zar'a Ya'qob to Northern African philosophers like the Egyptian Valentinus. Valentinus' gnosticism borrows heavily from ancient Egyptian cosmology. Oromo worldviews as presented by Gemetchu are holistic, as is the cosmology of ancient Egypt.

Coupling sage philosophy in numerous African cultures to literate philosophy in Ethiopia (Sumner's translations), Mali (the Timbuktu texts), and other African countries would be an arduous research program. But such a program might be the best chance for developing a holistic "galvanizing myth" that emerges from African history to stand against globalization.

MESSAY ON PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE, MYTH AND RATIONALITY

The most widely known modern Ethiopian philosopher is Zar'a Ya'qob. His short *Hatata* (translated as 'inquiry' or 'treatise,' but derived from a Ge'ez expression meaning to rub or grind into small pieces) is widely circulated in introductory philosophy anthologies. He is roughly contemporaneous with Descartes, and their methods are strikingly similar.

Both break down their topics into small parts and both rely on the light of reason to guide their investigations. Both use reason to establish the existence of God. Zar'a Ya'qob goes so far as to claim that reason alone can give us access to God – scriptures including the Bible and Koran contain much that is false in the light of reason. What is natural is what God prescribes – eating, procreation, monogamy, freedom, love. What is unnatural is prescribed by man and propagated through scripture – fasting, abstention from sex, polygamy, slavery, hatred. All men, says Zar'a Ya'qob, are liars, and men write scriptures (Zar'a Ya'qob in Sumner, 1976:13).

According to Claude Sumner, the discoverer of the *Hatata,* Zar'a Ya'qob goes so far as to excise key elements of Christian scripture through his *hatata* – the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, Incarnation, Redemption or Resurrection, the Mother of Christ, the Church, liturgy or sacraments (Sumner quoted in Messay, 1988:120). Zar'a Ya'qob exemplifies a philosophy of religion so corrosive that it matches 19th century European and American deism like that of Thomas Jefferson.

Astoundingly, Messay claims that Zar'a Ya'qob is *not* a philosopher. With Sumner, Messay admires Zar'a Ya'qob as an "architect of unity" (Sumner quoted in Messay *ibid.*:78). He viewed all religions as worshipping the same God. Like Descartes, he employs a method of doubt that is resolved only through the light of reason. But unlike Descartes, Zar'a Ya'qob doubts in order to establish "the authentic religion" that brings "peace and love among men" (Messay 1988: 84).

Messay's dogmatism on his rejection of Zar'a Ya'qob as a philosopher is curious. Zar'a Ya'qob's philosophy of religion is unique in the Ethiopia of his time, to say nothing of the wider world. His originality has precipitated Italian claims that the *Hatata* must have been written by an Italian missionary because it is so uncharacteristic of conventional Ethiopian thought of the 17th century (Sumner 1976: 61-275).

Messay's claim follows from his definition of philosophy. The whole point of Western philosophy, and "most probably the essence of philosophy in general" is to "explain and establish the possibility of scientific knowledge" (Messay, 1988:85). Messay does not single out Zar'a Ya'qob for exclusion. Banished from philosophy with him are Pascal and Kierkegaard "who refused to confront faith with science," who insisted that religious belief is outside the purview of science (*ibid.*:86). Unlike these philosophers, however, Zar'a Ya'qob was "not even aware of the existence of a scientific knowledge" (*ibid.*). Writing in 1988, Messay does not address the claims of Paul Feyerabend (1975) and Thomas Kuhn (1970) that science itself is grounded in faith – the faith, for example, that science is worth pursuing, that technology associated with science will not destroy life on earth, and that one research program is more worth pursuing than another.

The key to Messay's rejection of Zar'a Ya'qob as a philosopher lies in his explanation as to why Zar'a Ya'qob could not have developed a

philosophy. While Zar'a Ya'qob "contained all the seeds of philosophical thinking," these could not sprout "because of the negative pressure of the social forces" (*ibid.*:127). Only Marxism can "plant the seed" that will remove the "hampering features of the traditional culture" (*ibid.*:148). Philosophy's proper task is to "reflect on a culture in order to revolutionize it"(*ibid.*:144). Philosophy accomplishes this task as an adjuvant to rationality. Theories are rational to the degree that they are explanatory. But explanations are rational only if their language is scientific: "When the explanatory language takes the form of scientific language and refers to scientific arguments we have properly philosophy." Any explanation that doesn't take its force from "secular references" is "mythology or religion" (*ibid.*: 128). In separating religion and mythology from rationality, Messay reduces philosophy to science. He is in good company, even outside the ambit of Marxism. The American philosopher Willard Quine (1977; see Verharen 1996) views philosophy as simply the most general part of science. The Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001/1922) sees the philosopher as a warden making sure that philosophers do not attempt to do anything other than science.

Messay's remarks on the relations of philosophy, science and myth are presented in the context of an Ethiopian culture dominated by Marxism. His position changes dramatically after the fall of the Soviet Union. In Ethiopia under the influence of the Derg, philosophy's task is to hasten the revolution. For Messay writing in the United States, philosophy brokers a marriage between myth and rationality to guide Africa on the path to decolonization.

A myth for the "new" Messay is not the product of pure imagination careless of its connections to experience. On the other hand a myth does not convey knowledge in any empirical sense. Messay takes his definition from Henri Bergson. The "myth-making function" of the mind develops concepts "that counterfeit reality as actually perceived, to the point of making us act accordingly" (Bergson quoted in Messay, 2004: 143). The point of a myth is to drive action. Religious myths illustrate Bergson's point. The corrosive power of thought presents us with "the inevitability of death, the appearance of selfishness in a being designed for social life, and the uncertainty of projected actions in a mechanical uncertain world" (*ibid.*:214). Religious myth thwarts those irresistible claims of rationality with the conviction that our real lives start after death where selfishness will be punished and altruism rewarded. Faith in God's love protects us from an unfriendly world. Myth overcomes the dispiriting claims of rationality.

To have the power to direct action in the face of overwhelming odds, a myth is most forcefully presented as evolving from and continuing a venerable historical tradition. Neither flights of pure fancy nor scientific explanations evoke the power of myth. Myths are conveyed as the stories we tell ourselves to motivate us to action. The most powerful myths are those that command the will of whole nations. And a nation's "capacity to

tell a story determines the degree to which a nation controls its destiny" (*ibid.*:146).

Messay's research in his *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization* is a search for a grounding myth, an *ur-myth* that will allow the whole African continent to control its destiny. As we shall see in the essay's third section, Messay paints Leopold Senghor's Negritude and Cheikh Anta Diop's Afrocentrism as myth-making efforts that must fail by reason of their racializing characteristics. The African struggle against the effects of colonization is difficult, in part because of the European imposition of a "cult of rationality" on Africans. This cult, itself a myth, imposed science as a standard of rationality and thereby robbed Africans of their "power to believe" (*ibid.*:219). Senghor hoped to restore that power by disparaging European rationality. Diop's restoration claimed that black Africa gave birth to European rationality.

Messay opposes myth to rationality. I have not found an explicit definition of rationality in his research, but it is clear that the model of rationality is science as a synthesis of experience and reasoning. Myth and science live together in the modern world but they clash with one another. Messay quotes Bergson: "experience may indeed say 'that is false,' and reasoning [may say] 'that is absurd.' Humanity only clings all the more to that absurdity and that error" (*ibid.*:213). Nevertheless, myth and rationality cannot live without each other. Messay claims that "rationality always teams up with myth" and that "mythical thinking is coextensive with rationality" (*ibid.*:151). Nevertheless the two forces must achieve a delicate balance: "excessive valorization of rationality results in the complete asphyxiation of the power of the mind." The "myth-making function" must retain its autonomy to achieve its "empowering purpose" (*ibid.*: 212). What I question is Messay's separation of myth from rationality. In the next section I propose a holistic definition of rationality that includes both functions.

A CRITIQUE OF MESSAY'S SEPARATION OF MYTH AND RATIONALITY

Messay's error is to separate myth and rationality. He goes so far as to say that "myth is not knowledge" (*ibid.*:213). He invokes Kwasi Wiredu's support in claiming that "even in the contemporary world, mythical representations resist the impact of rationality" (*ibid.*). Rather than defining *myth* as the product of imagination disconnected from science, I regard it as *muthos,* a "likely story" in the original Greek. We deploy our myths in this sense when we've reached the limits of knowledge, when we're not sure of how to go on with what we're doing, when we must go on regardless and we must seize upon uncertain guidelines for our direction. Myth-making is integral to rationality as its founding and guiding principles.

Under the influence of Bergson, Messay supposes that "myth confers a transcendent meaning on existence with the consequence that rationality is

used as a device for going after the promised transcendence" (*ibid.*:xi). To see that myth need not "confer a transcendent meaning on existence," one need only consult Messay's original mentor, Karl Marx, who insisted that his own particular myth of freedom as the engine of human history could in no way be transcendent. Rationality must have a goal and that goal need be no more transcendent than securing air, water, food, or shelter.

Rationality is our genetically endowed capacity to select and carry out our goals. Before rationality became self-conscious or reflexive, goal selection and execution were automated processes. Goals unencumbered by myths for humanity – as for other mammals – were survival and flourishing, set within the limits of the environment. Because our large brains have given us the capacity for massive abstraction and imagination, we can now change the environment to suit our goals in ways that other animals do not. Our rationality now includes not only goal selection but the capacity to alter "naturally ordained" goals through rationality's reflexive function. Rather than being the instruments of a natural selection oriented toward survival, humans can now chose liberty over life or love over self-interest: in the often-quoted words of Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death!"

Not only our means for reaching goals but the goals themselves are subjected to rationality's critical gaze. Marx's peculiar myth was to imagine that humans are inexorably driven toward freedom as the highest, most human expression of survival and flourishing. He could not imagine that humans as a species could choose extinction – against nature's own dictates.

Marx's corollary myth, still shared by Messay, was that science is perfectly modeled in its European expressions. Like language (see Chomsky 2000) and morality (see Hauser 2006), rationality is genetically endowed. As every human is capable of speech and moral behavior, so every human being is capable of expressing rationality in the form of science. Here I use *science* in the sense of abstracting from experience to form guiding generalizations. (*Experience* includes mental as well as sensory phenomena – even the most theoretical mathematics is, after all, an experience.) As those generalizations begin to conform more precisely to the constraints of rationality itself, science begins to take on its modern mathematical form.

Rationality's constraints follow from its evolutionary function. The complex brain and its capacity for imagination and abstract thought augment our capacity for survival. A brain that can map selected patterns in its environment and base its behavior on those patterns has a better chance of survival than an organism that reacts "blindly" to its circumstances through chemical signals or purely automated stimulus-response mechanisms. We move from a handful of humans in the "African Eve" era some 200,000 years ago to over six billion strong today.

Humans are gifted with the ability to externalize their mapping functions through the use of symbols. Symbols express their own survival

capacities by triggering emotional responses that move us to replicate them – the memetic process. Symbols have emotional as well as semantic and syntactic meaning. We select symbol sets, theories, in part by reason of their capacity accurately to reflect our experience. Symbols capture our "con-cepts," literally our "grabbings together" of the patterns extracted from the environment through sensory "per-ceptions," literally "grabbings through." The connectedness of symbols to one another and to our experience is a condition for rationality as the complete expression of the human ability to draw connections. The use of symbols to connect abstract concepts with lived experience accurately is another condition for rationality.

Following Kant's example I would like to enumerate a complete set of conditions for rationality (see Messay 2004:146). Kant was on the right track in searching for the conditions of the possibility of "ob-jective" (literally, *thrown toward)* experience in the frameworks of space and time and the categories of causality and the like. Because my reflections are based on evolutionary theory rather than Kantian apodictic certainty, I look for the techniques we use to refine our approaches toward our goals. Rather than setting conditions for rationality, I look for the promptings we use to adjust our ways of achieving *and* revising our goals.

Like Marx and Darwin before him, I assume that evolution bequeathed us "natural" goals of surviving and flourishing. Our contemporary era with its potential for nuclear and environmental catastrophe shows that rationality has the capacity to subvert such goals. Nevertheless the rational methods we use to achieve our goals have so far not been subverted. We are prompted to ensure the emotive, semantic, and syntactic force of the symbols we use to "re-present" experience (the first presentation was through the senses). From Socrates' persistent efforts to clarify the meanings of key abstract terms like *good* and *justice,* to Wittgenstein's insistence that philosophy *is* clarification, specifying the nature and limits of meaning has been philosophy's preoccupation. The reason flows from the very nature of "sym-bols," literally "throwings together." Symbols acquire their meanings through (initial) acts of choice. The nature and limits of choices of symbols must be continually reviewed.

A second prompting flows from the need to re-present experience accurately. This prompting is enshrined in the correspondence theory of truth. Empiricism's importance in the history of philosophy is a reflection of the experiential aspect of rationality.

A third prompting insists that theoretical systems for re-presentation cannot offer "contra-dictory" (speaking against themselves) representations of experience. The coherence theory of truth has captured this tactic of rationality. Rationalism's role in the history of philosophy expresses the importance of this prompting, especially visible in Leibniz's proposal for a "universal calculus."

A fourth prompting reminds us of the practical function of rationality: we think for a purpose, and theories that cannot accomplish their purposes

cause us to rethink them. This prompting is expressed in the pragmatic theory of truth. The pragmatism of American philosophy has cross-cultural roots that extend to philosophy's earliest manifestations in Greek (Stoicism, hedonism), Indian (Buddhism in particular) and Ancient Egyptian philosophy (with its emphasis on *Maat's* regulative role in human conduct).

A fifth prompting suggests that those theories are best that cover the widest range of experience. Aristotle's conviction that the philosopher knows all things is an early manifestation of this aspect of rationality. Hegel's dictum, "the truth is the whole," captures this prompting perfectly. A contemporary expression is the attempt of string theorists in physics to encapsulate the laws for the four known forces into a single super-law. Like Marx, Einstein hoped that scientific generalizations could capture both natural and human phenomena without discrimination.

A sixth prompting is simply a measure of the abstractness of a theory. The fewer symbols required for a theory's representation of experience, the more abstract the theory. Rationality's power lies in its abstractive capacity. Einstein's $E=mc^2$ ranges over the whole universe with its perfect simplicity in both theoretical and practical ways. All mathematically inclined philosophers like Pythagoras, Plato, Leibniz, and Husserl have emphasized this aspect of rationality. Simplicity was the guiding rule of the first philosophy we have access to. The ancient Egyptians reduced all reality to the chaotic primordial water – *Nun.* And contemporary scientists in their capacity as philosophers have followed an analogous model in reducing the complexity of the universe to the simplicity of the hydrogen atom in the Big Bang.

The seventh and final prompting springs from rationality's reflexive capacity. Socrates' insistence that he knew only that he did not know is European philosophy's most famous expression of this aspect of rationality. Theories as systems for re-presenting experience change dramatically because of experience's resistance to theory's constraints ("essentialising" in postmodern jargon) and because of our imagination's inexhaustible nature.

Philosophy is a primary locus of rationality's imaginative powers. Rationality starts with a goal, and philosophy supplies the goals that justify all other goals. Because ultimate goals that justify concatenations of lesser goals cannot themselves be justified, philosophical goals have the character of likely stories or myths. Not knowing the origins of the universe or the purpose of life, for example, we can choose to live within the bounds of ignorance. If we restrict ourselves to scientific knowledge, we cannot explain the origins of the hydrogen atoms that made the Big Bang possible. But the acceptance of that ignorance is a choice that competes with other choices – God as an explanation of atoms' origins, for example. The eternal existence of hydrogen atoms (or their equivalent in energy) or the eternal existence of a force beyond our comprehension that generates hydrogen atoms are both likely stories, myths.

Rationality starts with a myth. Philosophy's task is to imagine that myth and to find compelling reasons to pursue the myth. If the myth and its subsets produce compelling results within rationality's constraints, it becomes difficult to modify or dislodge it. The alteration or destruction of a foundational, guiding myth is also philosophy's task. Dislodging myths takes place even within the contexts of well-established scientific theories. Einstein replaces Newton's foundational principles (Euclidian geometry, infinite universe, rectilinear unimpeded motion, gravitational action at a distance) with his own (Riemannian geometry, finite unbounded universe, curvilinear motion and space). Both practice a version of a "scientific method," namely a mathematization of experience. Both accept the likely story that engaging in this activity is a worthy endeavor. But unanimity on this *ur-myth* yields to downstream disagreement.

A greater imaginative gulf separates Newton and Einstein from Aristotle. Consider the distance between Aristotle's ideas that falling objects long for their resting place and that the soul "animates" the living organism and contemporary Newtonian and Einsteinian mechanics and Darwinian-based genetics. Is Aristotle more mythical, more philosophical than contemporary hard-nosed scientists? A myth is just that, a likely story. All likely stories are grounded in the conviction that they point out directions worth pursuing. A story like contemporary science may end with the termination of our capacity to tell stories, should current geo-politics yield a nuclear weapons exchange capable of producing nuclear winter. How likely a story is that!

We cannot reject even the most apparently preposterous myths out of hand. Examples abound in the history of science. Newton shocked classical sensibilities with his proposal that the heavenly and the earthly follow the same basic laws. Darwin's likely story about the unified origins of humans and animals still has an almost universal shock capacity. Marx's likely story is that humans must follow the as yet undiscovered natural laws that govern the whole universe. A shocking myth to those whose spiritual sensibilities insist on human freedom from nature's constraints.

Examples are easier to find in the history of philosophy. Witness the pre-Socratic madness, as it must have appeared to Greeks accustomed to supernatural explanations rather than generalized descriptions of natural phenomena. Consider the Christian imperative of universal, unconditional love – an apparent transgression of all our natural instincts for survival and flourishing. Think of how unnatural Hindu and Buddhist meditation must appear to cultures bent on manipulation of the whole earth environment.

If we grant that likely stories are an integral part of a scientific expression of rationality, is there any rigid way to judge a myth's quality of rationality? Let us postulate as an hypothesis (a likely story!) that rationality is a function of connectivity. The rationality of a myth as a likely story can be measured by the numbers and kinds of connections that issue from its guiding principles. Einstein and Copernicus supersede Newton and Ptolemy not because we can be sure that their myths, their radical

assumptions that direct their connective efforts, are true in any sense of that term. Relativity and heliocentrism merely satisfy rationality's promptings in greater degree. Both Einstein and Newton allow us to navigate the whole universe with their theories. By this measure, scope, their theories are superior to those of Kepler, Galileo and Ptolemy whose theories restricted us to the local "heavens" or the earth. Nevertheless, Ptolemy's assumptions still serve as a foundation for modern celestial navigation.

Thomas Kuhn's work showed how heliocentrism was more rational than geocentrism (before our ability to detect celestial parallax) because of its simplicity, its use of fewer symbols to cover planetary, lunar, and perceived solar motion. Confronted with a failure to find experimental confirmation of one of his theories, Einstein affirmed his support for his theory because of its simplicity, economy, or "beauty" (subsequent experiments proved him correct). Newtonian mechanics are still accurate for purposes of space ballistics, but Einstein's relativity is more accurate for greater velocities and masses.

Consider the likely story that malaria is caused by "bad air" (the etymology of *mal-aria).* Such a story might be as practical as a theory of bacterial transmission by the anopheles mosquito. Draining a swamp to get rid of the bad air would stop malaria. But the anopheles theory unfolds into a greater range of experience more accurately. The likely story that malaria is caused by "bad air" comes to a full stop rather quickly. Pursuit of the detailed nature of "bad air" would be as fruitless as the quest for the "caloric," the mysterious cause of heat propagation.

Perhaps the most important measure of the rationality of a likely story is whether the story encodes instructions for "knowing how to go on," in Wittgenstein's felicitous phrase. A theory that enfolds itself in other theories, that advances a tradition, that provokes us to call itself into question, is a fruitful or stimulating theory.

Even the measures of rationality can themselves be called into question through metatheoretical investigation. Consistency is one of the bedrock postulates of rationality. "Do I contradict myself? I contain multitudes!" This phrase may be a fine poetic sentiment. But non-contradiction has achieved the status as one of the "laws of thought" for Wiredu (1996), and it is enshrined as a "theory of truth." Nevertheless, quantum mechanics has called forth "quantum logic," a multi-valued logic used to address Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Einstein's destruction of our common sense notions of the fixity of mass, length and time does not compare to quantum mechanic's assault on consistency as a primary root of rationality. The principle is so intuitively self-evident: To reason is to connect. Let us not imagine that what we have claimed to be connected is in the same sense and at the same time disconnected.

What hope have we, then, of separating rational from irrational myths? "Purely" mythological symbol systems yield low rates of connectivity – even within "highly" rational systems like science. The symbol *gravity,* for example, has taken on quite different "life forms" in the history of modern

science. *Gravity* used as an abstract term to refer to the entire field of gravitational phenomena exhibits a high degree of connectivity. *Gravity* used as a term to refer to the mysterious force acting at a distance to *explain* gravitational phenomena has only emotional rather than semantic connectivity. We simply don't know why mass behaves in gravitational ways – though our generalizations for describing these ways are quite useful.

Newton prudently avoided any speculation about this mysterious force acting at a distance across the vacuum of space. In his famous words, "*hypotheses non fingo*" – I don't make up stories. (Of course he made up the story that he should not make up stories – a perfect illustration of the emotive, reflexive and directive force of foundational myths, likely stories.) The bolder Descartes replaced Newton's vacuum of space with a plenum of "etherial" matter, and explained gravitational attraction as the result of vortices in this medium. Einstein like Newton had a horror of action at a distance, but Michelson and Morley could find no evidence of a Cartesian "aether." Consequently, Einstein claimed that the curvature of space in the presence of mass "explains" gravitational phenomena.

Were the likely stories, the *ur-hypotheses* of Newton, Descartes and Einstein *rational?* Their uses of the symbol *gravity* propelled centuries of investigation that has not so far proven fruitful. A recent hypothesis is that gravitational force is carried by "gravitons," waves or particles like photons. To date, no gravity wave detectors have yielded uncontroversial results.

Einstein's efforts to explain gravitational phenomena by warping space are analogous to earlier attempts to explain heating. The mysterious substance, the *caloric,* had little connectivity. This likely story spurred investigation into the nature of the caloric. But the term lost its emotive and semantic force when heat was described as the motion of molecules, "mean kinetic energy." The explanatory force of mysterious substances like heat or gravity vanishes in a sea of generalized descriptions, the massive connectivity of contemporary science.

Ruminations on *gravity* lead to questions about the rationality of *God* as the explanation of all explanations. Are uses of such a term "purely" mythical, as Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* proposes? The term *God* generates powerful emotive connections. There may be a direct correlation between the abstractness of a term and its emotive force. However, the semantic connectivity of *God* has more the character of syntactic connections. The likely stories clustered around *God* derive their force from the biographical details of God, generated by cultures over the ages. To date, the stories do not have semantic force outside of themselves, except for believers who subscribe to "divine interventions" in the form of divine responses to prayers, miracles and the like.

Are likely stories about God rational? Their persistence and power might be explained by our natural conditioning to refuse to accept states of ignorance on important issues and to refuse to accept the fact of death as a

permanent condition: "There are no atheists in the foxholes." We create hope in the hopeless situation with religious connectivity. Richard Dawkins' protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, many of us are reluctant to "abandon all hope."

Given the tortured and brief quality of the history of thought, assessing rationality is a task best undertaken with great diffidence. So many of our cherished likely stories in the past five thousand years have been exposed as irrational in some fundamental way that perhaps the best likely story is Socrates': we can only be certain of our uncertainty. Most provocative are the claims of some religious stories to produce extraordinary connectivity. The (in)famous guru of the Beatles, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, promises to make a science out of meditation, to teach his disciples to fly without mechanical means, to bring world peace about through a critical mass of disciples meditating in one geographic location. Preposterous? Irrational? Purely mythical?

Paul Feyerabend's claim in his own (in)famous *Against Method* is that "anything goes." All myths have equal stature in the face of our abyssal ignorance, and science is one myth among many. More seductive than many other myths, contemporary science delivers massive control of the environment. Exercising such control without a full understanding of its consequences requires abundant optimism or massive pessimism: "It will come out all right in the end – Gaia will take care of us even if we mess up," or "It doesn't really matter what we do since we're all going to die anyway – what difference does it make if all of us die all at once? Think of the untold misery those unborn billions will have escaped!"

Science guarantees results. How could science be mythical? The myth of science is that science is worth pursuing. Humans wonder, as Aristotle said, as the sparks fly up. Science is irresistible. How could anyone doubt that science is worth pursuing? And given the progress in the history of science, how could anyone question the rationality of our contemporary pursuit of science?

How to pursue science is one question. Whether to pursue science is another. Only philosophy can answer these questions. Philosophy is just that part of rationality that selects the basic assumptions we use to guide our lives. Philosophy's foundations are themselves without foundations. That's why philosophical choices even in the fields of ontology and epistemology always have the character of ethical choices. Can my choice of the defining constraints of rationality themselves be rational? They are like Wiredu's "social ideals." These are the foundational principles of a society. Choices of social ideals are "neither scientific nor unscientific, rational nor irrational" (Wiredu 1997: 143).

As foundational principles, the defining constraints of rationality are postulated as starting principles; we cannot assign the same status to them as the deliberations that rest upon them. They're like the definitions and axioms that produce theorems in geometry – simply not susceptible to proof within the system. One cannot prove that Euclid's parallel line postulate –

given a point outside a straight line, only one line can be drawn through that point parallel to the straight line – is better than its competitors. Why not assume Lobachevski's infinite number of parallel lines? Or Riemann's null set of parallel lines? One cannot prove that a life with science in its current technological expressions is better than a life without science. If one valued survival over manipulation of the environment, and one could prove that the contemporary expressions of science will terminate life on earth as we know it, one could prove that a life without science is far better than a life with science.

Do we have a choice in the matter of such foundational myths? Previously, no. Natural selection dictated our choices. After 9/11 we should be clear that a small group can exercise enormous destructive power. In a few years the development of biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction may allow small groups to terminate human life altogether. For the first time in history, humans can now exercise a choice about whether we should "choose to keep on choosing" or to commit speciescide. To that end, we need a full complement of philosophies to stimulate our imaginations about what life is and how we should live it.

MESSAY'S PROPOSALS FOR PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICA NOW

Messay's review of Africana philosophy in *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization* is comprehensive and incisive. His critique covers a full spectrum, from Marcien Towa's dismissal of attempts to look for that philosophy in Africa herself, to Senghor and Diop's discovery of that philosophy in Africa and Africa alone. He resists Towa's claim that an assuredly pre-existing African philosophy "need not be recovered for the simple reason that it was utterly worthless" (Messay 2004:88). He is sensitive to Mudimbe's contention that scholarship on Africa to date has produced only an "invention" of Africa, one that has mythical rather than rational qualities (*ibid.*: 20). Messay recognizes that philosophical research cannot reproduce original African philosophies that might contain the seeds of African renewal. He applauds Hountondji's insistence that an "ethnophilosophy" that serves merely anthropological purposes is useless for the purposes of decolonization (*ibid.*: 87). In this vein he finds Nkrumah and Nyerere's discoveries of an original African socialism to be instruments for African political leaders' successful recolonization of Africa – with oligarchy parading as socialism (*ibid.*: 162-169).

Messay singles out Oruka's demand for a transition from "ethnophilosophy" to "sage philosophy" as particularly problematic (*ibid.*: 91-94). The critical function of the latter attempts to save philosophy from becoming a disguised version of anthropology but in the process accepts the idea that philosophical sages are exceptions to the mythical norm of "primitive" African thought. Sage philosophy cannot generate a myth capable of decolonizing Africa.

Particularly appealing to Messay is Appiah's claim that an authentic African identity can emerge only from a choice (*ibid.*: 138-141). Identities claiming their heritage in historical or material determinism can only be false. Appiah singles out Senghor and Diop for particular criticism. Accepting the European characterization of Africans as emotional rather than rational, Senghor celebrates African empathy with nature and emotional artistic expression. Diop finds black Africans to be the architects of the glorious ancient Egyptian culture, and discovers geographical reasons why Africans have virtues like communalism that escape traditional European cultures.

Messay capitalizes on Appiah's emphasis on choice of identity to modify Senghor and Diop's "galvanizing myths." If the African celebration of emotion is the product of choice rather than genetic determinism, then Senghor's negritude may be rehabilitated. However, Messay rejects Senghor's vision of complementarity between Africa and Europe. In mythical if not mystical language, he accuses negritude of "failing to foster a demiurgical orientation from the bosom of negritude itself" (*ibid.*: 219).

The myth appropriate to African decolonization must be rooted in Africa herself, even if European refinements of rationality will be the technical instruments of decolonization. Senghor's acceptance of a "descriptive [scientific] racially determined notion of negritude, instead of a freely created one" vitiated the movement. Because Senghor succumbed to determinism, he could not change the African past into a viable future: "rewriting ... the past in light of present ambitions is how an unfolding subject endowed with a sense of mission moves toward a concocted future" (*ibid.*:220). The mission is the myth. And the myth, having only the status of a likely story, must be freely chosen.

For Messay, Diop's myth is no more successful than Senghor's. However, his myth changed "Egyptian pyramids into Negro testimonies." His inspiration, like all Afrocentric theories, demands "something higher than the mere removal of oppression" (*ibid.*: 219). Nevertheless, Diop's myth, like Senghor's, is a product of ethnophilosophy. It cannot stand without Messay's revision which is the product of his own highly critical philosophy.

Messay's desired myth assumes messianic proportions: "In claiming what the West despises, Africans redefine themselves as negativity, as the antithetical subjectivity intent on recreating humanity by the insertion of values and beliefs extracted from the experience of negativity" (*ibid.*:212). He compares Africans in their quest for a decolonizing myth to Christians who created a new model of what it is to be human by "valorizing the poor and weak" (*ibid.*). The next section will consider whether indigenous African philosophies, critical in their own right, have a better chance of producing a "galvanizing myth" for African decolonization than Messay.

FROM ETHNOPHILOSOPHY TO SAGE PHILOSOPHY IN ETHIOPIA

Messay makes an impassioned plea for a "galvanizing" myth that can pull Africa out of its slough of despondence. Such a myth, he asserts, should come from a "re-creation" of traditional African grounding myths. This recreation will not resuscitate traditional African ways of life – it simply hasn't the power. His primary candidates for this myth are a "deracialized" Negritude and Afrocentrism. Africans have something unique to offer the world not because of their imagined race but because of their choices.

Messay's own myth about a galvanizing myth is laudable, but his method short-circuits the work that needs to be done to produce this "galvanizing" myth. Negritude and Afrocentrism are as limiting as Nkrumah and Nyerere's traditional African socialism. Are better models possible? A promising solution is to apply Odera Oruka's methodology for sage philosophy to Claude Sumner's research in Oromo philosophy in Ethiopia.

Oruka's method separates ethnophilosophy from sage philosophy. The former reports on worldviews while the latter presents philosophy in action. The test of a sage philosopher is to be found in rationality. Is the philosopher self-consciously critical of customary beliefs? Does the sage philosopher propose modifications or substitutions? Is the philosopher capable of specifying the reasons underlying his or her critique? Oruka's model searches for rational criticism by means of dialogical interviews. Oruka's research has established a method for separating anthropological recording of worldviews from critical reflection on and revision of those views (1990, 1991, 1994).

Sumner has produced three volumes of what he calls Oromo "sapiential literature" (Sumner 1995:23). His method relies on anthropological fieldwork that produced written transcriptions of Oromo songs, proverbs, and folktales translated into German, Italian, and English as well as Amharic transcription. With the help of anthropologists and linguists fluent in Oromo dialects, he produced English translations of the material under the title of Oromo "wisdom literature" (Sumner 1995, 1996a, 1996b). In his view, his work is not a mere recording of worldviews, an ethnophilosophy, but an expression of living Oromo wisdom.

Interestingly, Sumner relied heavily in his research on Oromo informants, including Gemetchu Megerssa, who both checked Sumner's translations and translated original transcriptions into English (Sumner 1995: 5, 6, 9).   Sumner's collaborative research methodology coincides with a paradigm proposed more than half a century ago by African American philosopher Alain Locke. Locke suggested that philosophers cannot do their work without assistance from the social sciences, especially sociology, psychology, and anthropology, particularly in the field of ethics (Locke 1989).

My proposal for the practice of sage philosophy in Ethiopia is to systematically combine the methods of Oruka and Sumner. Their combined virtue is to insist on the separation of ethnophilosophy and sage philosophy. Sumner's particular virtue was to enlist the aid of linguists and anthropologists in presenting the raw material of Oromo philosophy.

Sumner's assistant, Gemetchu Megerssa, was encouraged to pursue Oromo anthroplogy by Lambert Bartels. Bartels was a missionary in Ethiopia who was inspired by his own natural inclination and the Second Vatican Council to apply techniques of "mutual inculturation" to his work with the Oromo in Ethiopia (Tablino 2005:37). His guiding idea was that the Oromo practice of the Catholic faith should be an expression of their own cultural foundations. Gemetchu was the grandson of the last *gada* (generation-graded socio-political structure) leader in the Macca (also spelled "Matcha"), the Westernmost Oromo group in Ethiopia. In addition to assisting Sumner, he subsequently co-authored a paper with Bartels and went on to write his Ph.D. dissertation on the Oromo at the University of London.

With the help of Gemetchu, Bartels developed a profile of Oromo religion to discover "through sincere and patient dialogue ... the riches which the generous God has distributed among the nations" (Bartels quoted in Tablino, *ibid.*) Their method included "listening to what the Oromo people themselves have to say" in order to "allow the people to speak for themselves." For example, Bartels refused to characterize the supreme Oromo divinity, *Waaqa,* as omniscient or omnipresent to avoid "hellenizing" the concept (Baxter and Kassan 2005: 5). Ironically, one commentator calls Bartels a "Socrates among the Oromo" who sought as a philosopher "to discover the Oromo vision of the universe, of God, of man, of life, and of things" (Tablino 2005: 37).

Bartel's "philosophical" method has several limitations. In the later part of his life he speculated that the "Oromo religious concepts might have a Hindu Indian origin" (Baxter and Kassam 2005:4). The Oromo cosmology is much closer to that of ancient Egypt than that of ancient India. Water plays a crucial role in both ancient Egyptian and Oromo cosmologies (Hornung 1990, Megerssa 1983) and no role whatsoever in the Hindu creation myths. Equally plausible speculation could suggest that Oromo beliefs were influenced by Egypt through Red Sea trade routes south to the land of Punt. And nothing prevents further speculation that Oromo or other Cushitic cultures may have had an impact on ancient Egyptian culture.

A second limitation of Bartel's work is that he did not systematize the various aspects of Oromo thought into an organized whole. Gemetchu undertook this task in his Ph.D. dissertation, "Knowledge, Identity and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo of East and Northeast Africa" (Baxter and Kassam: 5). A third limitation is that Bartels did not look for the model of rationality that produced Oromo philosophy. A perfect example of sage philosophy in action would be to engage the Oromo in a

dialogue about the wisdom of modifying Oromo philosophy to conform to Christian doctrine.

The limitations of Bartel's model are easily corrected by including ethnographers as well as philosophers on sage philosophy research teams. Sumner began to put this model into practice through his collaboration with linguists and anthropologists. However, he did not capitalize on Oruka's insistence that dialogue grounded in rationality be the method of sage philosophical research. From his part, however, Oruka did not rely on the services of professional linguists and anthropologists.

My proposed new model for sage philosophy research teams would bring anthropologists and philosophers together. The methodology of these teams would include two phases that would be interwoven with one another. The first phase is a systematic, in-depth, dialogical (or polylogical – see Gutema 2004) exploration of informants' answers to four basic philosophical questions corresponding to four areas of philosophy – ontology, epistemology, axiology, and praxiology. The four questions include "what exists," "how can that be known," "what is the value of what exists," and "how may the theoretical beliefs comprising the answers to these three questions be put into practice." The dialogue should include the informants, an anthropologist fluent in their language and trained in ethnography, as well as a philosopher. The informants should include not only individuals qualifying as sage philosophers, but other members of the community. This aspect of the fieldwork is important because of the need to distinguish between sage philosophers' views and those of their community members. Oruka points out that philosophical sages "act like a gadfly" for their communities and "sometimes the community rebels against them, and then they become very lonely" (Oruka 1997: 253). Or dead – shades of Socrates!

Interpreting the Borana people of the Oromo group, the Ethiopian anthropologist Sahlu Kidane points out that "most" of the questions asked by anthropologists about interpretations of cultural narratives "turn out to be something the people have never thought about before." Even though the people "perform" the narratives, "they do not often make critical examinations [of them]." Often the performers are "unconscious of some of their attitudes and practices" (Kidane 2002: 73). The problems confronting sage philosophy teams will be complex.

The second phase of the revised method includes a systematic, in-depth exploration of the informants' pursuit of rationality, with emphasis on the hyper-reflexive function of philosophy. The dialogue should make extensive use of the seven promptings of rationality outlined above in section three. The task here is to determine whether the informants are aware of alternatives to their answers to the four basic questions, and to see whether they provide rational reasons for their choices. Including a broad range of community members in the dialogue together with candidates for sage philosophy will help show whether my proposed model of rationality is indeed at work in the community. The model of rationality I sketched in

the second section of the essay is tentative at best. The best outcome of sage philosophy research team dialogues would show that alternative models to my proposal of rationality are required. An example of such a model emerging from African culture is the ancient Egyptian postulation of a multi-valued logic, as described by Eric Hornung in his *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (see also Hornung 1982). My brief sketch assumes that the principle of non-contradiction is clear and compelling. Hornung's research suggests that the ancient Egyptian understanding of the principle is at once more complex and more practical than our own.

What is the compelling motive for pursuing sage philosophy in Ethiopia? One reason is to test Diop's hypothesis of cultural transmission from ancient Egypt to other parts of Africa and its converse. A second reason springs from the fact that culture is preserved not only by means of language but also by philosophy. Cultures are being lost at the same rate as languages. Globalization may reduce the world's 6,000 or so languages to 2,000 within fifty years. Wiredu proposes retaining cultures' philosophical cores even while contemporary science and technology transform their accidental features (cited in Messay 2004:116). To discover a culture's deepest foundations through sage philosophy increases the chance of cultural survival.

A third reason for pursuing sage philosophy in Ethiopia lies in the fact that a philosophy is a work of art – in the senses of both practical and fine art. A culture survives in part through the execution of its philosophical guidelines; a culture's philosophy is part of its proven technology for survival. And philosophies, by reason of their high degrees of generalization and expression through minimalist sets of symbols, are beautiful by reason of their economy and simplicity. A fourth reason to keep these philosophical works of art alive is to discover the collective past of humanity, and to stimulate further creativity in the world's collective philosophy. A fifth reason is the longest stretch – to hope to find a galvanizing myth with filiations throughout a large number of African cultures (Verharen 1998). My tentative hypothesis is that ancient Egyptian holism may be widely reflected across Africa.

Where in Africa will Messay's galvanizing myth come from? Messay headed in the right direction by singling out Cheikh Anta Diop for attention. However, by focusing on Diop's claim that black Africans built the pyramids, Messay missed Diop's deeper message for African unification. Diop holds that ancient Egypt is the key to a future African renaissance in the same way that Greece was critical to the European renaissance (Diop 1991; see Verharen 2006: 1997a). Debate continues to rage over Diop's argument that ancient Egyptian philosophy launched Greek philosophy. But Diop's galvanizing myth for African unity "looks back to take the past" in the manner of Ghana's Sankofa bird – the point of looking back is to create the future. Africa's historical impact on Europe through Greece is irrelevant to her constitution of the future. Diop's vision

of an African future springs from his conviction that ancient Egypt is a reflection of a much wider African cultural heritage based on cultural exchange throughout Africa, from northern to southern Africa and back again. Theodore Celenko's (1996) extraordinary *Egypt in Africa* is the most forceful exhibition of ancient Egyptian links to a wider Africa.

A RESEARCH PROGRAM: TOWARD A GALVANIZING MYTH

My proposal is to attempt to unearth filiations among the Oromo peoples, the Cushite empire, gnosticism, and ancient Egypt (Assman 1998, Hornung 2001). My research model is the reverse of Sumner's method. He started with the written exogenous sources of Ethiopian philosophy. He calls his method an "outside-in" method. His research finishes with three volumes on endogenous Ethiopian philosophy. I suggest that we start with Oromo fieldwork done according to a revised Sumner/Oruka methodology, then work outward through written texts and orature to wider Africa. The hope is to find extensive filiations of Ethiopian philosophy with other African philosophies. A fertile ground for research outside Ethiopia would be the extensive texts from the university of Sankore in Timbuktu in Mali. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has spurred efforts toward preserving and disseminating these writings.

One hypothesis is that modern Oromo cultures are an expression of wider Cushitic cultures that extended from Africa to India, with connections to ancient Egypt (Gemetchu 1993). The importance of water in Oromo cultures may be connected to the ancient Egyptian cosmology of the universe in a watery chaotic first principle. Water is the first principle of Egyptian cosmology but the second principle of Oromo cosmology. The Oromo sky God *Waaqa* creates the universe out of a pre-existing water called *Wallaabu* (Megerssa 1993:8). However, *Waaqa* may be the Oromo sky God not in any literal sense but in the sense of a sky that is the beyond of beyond, itself perfectly beyond our comprehension. The ancient Egyptian first principle of *Nun* is analogous to water, revered as the origin of the universe, and incomprehensible as well (Hornung 1990). I am not making any claims about cultural diffusion between ancient Egypt and Oromo cultures, but merely proposing research hypotheses.

To end on a personal note, what is my own galvanizing myth (Verharen 2001, 2002)? I search for better stories to tell ourselves than the European philosophical stories that have yielded potential nuclear and environmental catastrophe. Stories that do not end with billions of humans barely surviving, unable to satisfy their needs on the land, forced to migrate to large cities like Lagos and Mexico City to lead lives of unquiet desperation.

And my desired myth is much more ambitious than Diop's. His *Civilization or Barbarism* sought a galvanizing principle so that African civilization could stand against the European-style barbarism that began with African enslavement and colonization and continues with rampant

globalization. My hope is that a research program in African sage philosophy might help yield a network of holistic philosophies that the whole earth could use as a galvanizing myth against its own destruction (Verharen 2003).

Can a modified sage philosophy help deliver Messay's galvanizing myth? Philosophy may be epiphenomenal, the equivalent of ideology, as Engels suggests: "ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces compelling him remain unknown to him...." (Engels quoted in Messay 2004:10). For Engels, freedom is going to have its way with the world whether we help it along or not.

Philosophy may have no practical effect on the course of the world. But we do make use of decision trees to guide our lives: "If I want this, then I have to do that." Careful scrutiny of the foundational and guiding principles of these trees may lead to their revision, especially when a crisis threatens and we have a motive to change our behavior such as we have never had before. As I said above, 9/11 reminds us that a small group can cause enormous destruction. We now face a crisis unprecedented in human history. The exponential growth of technology may make it possible in the near future for small groups to destroy all human life. We now have a motive to discover or recover philosophies that encourage us, in the words of Rodney King, to "all get along."

Speaking of "the new world and the dreams to which it may give rise," Hegel hypothesized that freedom would achieve its apotheosis in the Americas, perhaps as a result of a contest between North and South America (Hegel 1956: 87, 86; see Verharen 1997b). Cuba spearheads that "contest" now, joined by Venezuela, Bolivia, and other Latin American countries. However, a larger contest between the Global North and South might produce a freedom that Hegel could not imagine. What a delicious irony if a galvanizing myth for such a freedom were to come out of the exercise of sage philosophy in Africa – the continent, according to Hegel, with no history, the continent saturated in savagery and myth.

REFERENCES

Assman, Jan. 1998. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Baxter, Paul and Kassam, Aneesa. 2005. Performing the *Soodduu* Ritual: Introduction to the Special Issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* in Memory of Father Lambert Bartels, *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12:1&2, 1-20.

Celenko, Theodore, (ed.), 1996. *Egypt in Africa.* Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana.

Chomsky, Noam. 2000. *On Nature and Language.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Diop, Cheik Anta. 1991/1981. *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology.* Trans. Ya-Lengi Meema. Chicago: Lawrence Hill.

Feyerabend, Paul. 1975. *Against Method.* New York: Humanities Press.

Graness, Anke, and Kresse, Kai (eds.), 1997. *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Gutema, Bekele. 2004. Introducing Intercultural Philosophy, *EJOSSAH: Ethiopian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2: 2, December, 29-49.

Hauser, Marc D. 2006. *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1956/1892. *The Philosophy of History.* Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Dover Publications.

Hornung, Erik. 2001/1999. *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West.* D. Lorton, Trans. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Hornung, Erik. 1990/1982. *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many.* Trans. J. Baines. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Hornung, Erik. 1982/1971. *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity.* Trans. D. Warburton. New York: Timken.

Kassam, Aneesa. 1995. *Gabra.* New York: Rosen Publishing.

Kebede, Messay. 2004. *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization.* Amsterdam and New York: Rodopoi.

Kebede, Messay. 1988. *Africa and Philosophy: The Case of Ethiopia.* Unpublished Manuscript. Addis Ababa: Addis Abba University, College of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy.

Kidane, Sahlu. 2002. *Borana Folktales: A Conceptual Study.* London: HAAN Publishing.

Kuhn, Thomas. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Locke, Alain. 1989. *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond.* Ed. L. Harris. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Megerssa, Gemetchu. 2005. The Oromo World-View, *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 12:1&2, 68-79.

Megerssa, Gemetchu. 1995. *Booran.* New York: Rosen Publishing.

Megerssa, Gemetchu. 1993. Knowledge, Identity and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo of East and Northeast Africa. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies.

Oruka, Odera. 1997. Part I: Essays by H. Odera Oruka, in *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam,* Graness, Anke, and Kresse, Kai (eds.), 23-138. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Oruka, Odera. 1992. *Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and Beliefs.* Nairobi: Initiative Publishers.

Oruka, Odera. 1991. *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy.* Nairobi: ACTS Press.

Oruka, Odera. 1990. *Trends in African Philosophy.* Nairobi: Shirikon Publishers.

Quine, Willard. 1977. *Ontological Relativity.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Sumner, Claude. 1974. *The Book of the Wise Philosophers.* Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press.

_____. 1976. *The Treatise of Zar'a Ya'qob and Walda Heyat: Text and Authorship.* Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

_____. 1978. *The Treatise of Zar'a Ya'qob and Walda Heyat: An Analysis.* Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

_____. 1981. *The Life and Maxims of Skendes.* Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

_____. 1982. *The Physiologue.* Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

_____. 1995. *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Collection and Analysis.* Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

_____. 1996a. Oromo *Wisdom Literature: Songs, Collection and Analysis.*Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

_____. 1996b. Oromo *Wisdom Literature: Folktales, Collection and Analysis.* Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

Tablino, Paul. 2005. Mutual Interculturation: The Missionary Approach of Lambert Bartels and its Influence on Catholic Missionaries in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia, *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 12:1&2, July, 35-51.

Verharen, Charles C. 2006. Philosophy Against Empire: An Ancient Egyptian Renaissance. *Journal of Black Studies* 36:6, July, 958-973.

_____. 2003. Afrocentricity, Ecocentrism, and Ecofeminism: New Alliances for Socialism. *Socialism and Democracy.* 17:2, Summer/Fall, 73-90.

_____. 2002. Black to the Future: A Philosophy for a Global Village. *Journal of Black Studies* 33:2, Fall, 199-217.

_____. 2001. African-Centeredness in the New Black Millennium, *The Literary Griot*, 13:1&2, Spring/Fall, 1-12.

_____. 1998. Environment, Culture, and Ethics: An African Concept of Evil. *Présence Africaine*, 158:2, Second Semester, 47-62.

_____. 1997a. In and Out of Africa: Misreading Afrocentrism. *Présence Africaine*, 156:2, Second Semester, 163-185.

_____. 1997b. 'The New World and the Dreams To Which It May Give Rise': An African and American Response to Hegel's Challenge. *Journal of Black Studies*, 27:4, March, 456-493.

_____. A Cultural Introduction to Philosophy. *Teaching Philosophy*, 19:1 March, 1996, 65-80.

Wiredu, Kwasi. 1997. Remembering Oruka, in *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka,* Graness, Anke, and Kresse, Kai (eds.), Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

_____. 1996. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2001/1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* Trans. D.F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge.

Zitelmann, Thomas. 2005. *Ayyaana* and the Possibility of a Sufi Legacy, *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 12:1&2, 80-99.

SECTION III

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

THE SPIRIT OF ROUSSEAU AND BORANA POLITICAL TRADITIONS:
AN EXERCISE IN UNDERSTANDING

TADDESE LENCHO

That government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. Abraham Lincoln

It [Democracy] is the don't in the Don't Shove.… Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time. … Democracy is a letter to the editor. Democracy is…. E. B. White

Electing a man after hearing him give self-praising speeches is no wiser than marrying a woman after watching her sing and dance in the company of a crowd of admiring warriors. A Borana elder

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, I went to *Yaballo Borana*, to provide training to a group of pastoralists. The subject of the training was on human rights from a developmental perspective. I was curious to learn from knowledgeable *Borana* elders called *hayyus* about their political traditions.

Three years later I took a political theory course for my PhD studies and one of the Western political philosophers we studied was the 18th century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Reading Rousseau's political writings, particularly his *Social Contract*, struck a special chord in me and brought back the memories from my trips to *Borana* land. I supplemented my anecdotal knowledge with research on Asmarom Legesse's *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System* and *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society.* Legesse's research confirmed that what I heard from the *Borana* elders was correct.

Two things fascinated me about the political outlook and laws of the *Borana*. When I met the elders, I found myself surrounded by a horde of children from the neighboring villages anxious to hear what I (a stranger) and the elders were saying to each other. The elders told me matter-of-factly that the children were encouraged to observe their elders discussing matters of leadership in order to prepare them for future leadership.

The other thing that fascinated me about the *Borana* was the range and quality of their laws. They have laws not just for humans, but also for domestic as well as wild animals. The *Borana* have an expression for this:

"*Seeri mumme, Seeri sare*!" (literally "laws for men, laws even for dogs") (Legesse 2006: 201). I was told that even the animals seem to have understood this gesture from humans and they return the favor. The cattle in *Borana* spend the nights outside, unattended in the presence of hyenas and foxes. I asked the elders how it is that the hyenas and foxes did not molest their animals. I received a most astonishing answer. It turned out the wild animals are also taken care of and therefore do not molest their domestic animals. The *Borana* have laws for the order in which the animals of the wild drink from their wells and I was told that the animals knew these laws.

How did the *Borana* manage to inaugurate such laws and institutions? Is it the result of strong constitutional tradition they have developed for centuries? Or is it a product of their rich tradition of popular participation in their assemblies? Or is it perhaps because the *Borana* have refused to recognize the right to hold land as private property? They regard land as the wife of the sky. Neither the sky nor the earth is appropriable. I wish to explore the causes of the effectiveness of their institutions and laws. I also wish to explore how the *Borana* managed to preserve their institutions not only from the invasions of neighboring peoples but also from internal degeneration.

While reading Rousseau's *Social Contract*, particularly his championing of popular democracy, I became interested in what Rousseau had to say about popular democracy in light of the fact that the *Borana* had been practicing their version of popular democracy for more than 350 years of recorded history. The practice of popular democracy in *Borana* preceded the birth of Rousseau by a hundred years. Rousseau appealed to the ancients to find evidence for his theories and rued the fact that his brand of democracy was no longer practiced among the 'moderns' of his time. He was quite unaware that his version of popular democracy was being practiced during his time but very far from the Europe.

In what follows, I hope to accomplish two objectives. First, to find similarities between some of Rousseau's political theories and the political tradition of a pastoralist community in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. [1] Second, to show that Rousseau's theories, though usually considered to be too ideal and quixotic to be of any practical utility deserve our attention.

This essay intends to encourage future researchers to explore Oromo democracy. The essay does not attempt to foster respectability for Oromo democracy by association with a more illustrious philosopher of democracy. There are affinities between Rousseau's political theories and the political practices of the *Borana,* where a unique African democracy is

---

[1] This political tradition (*Gadaa*) was a common heritage of a much larger people of the Oromo and much larger territory before it was engulfed by authoritarian and less egalitarian political practices since the second half of the 19th Century.

still alive and well – albeit threatened from all sides by authoritarian practices. These affinities are coincidental, of course, but they are interesting because the *Borana* have been practicing their unique brand of democracy for 350 years of recorded history. The actual duration of *Borana* democracy cannot be assessed, given present methodologies. .

For lack of time and space, I am going to focus in this paper on Rousseau's theories of the general will, popular sovereignty, and the role of the legislator. I juxtapose his theories with the practices of traditional democracy among the Oromos of present day Ethiopia and Northern Kenya.

INTRODUCTION TO OROMO POLITY

Borana land is located in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. The *Borana* are ethnically part of the greater Oromo people, who are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. The people, the *Borana*, still practice the *Gadaa* system (Helland 1996: 137). The *Borana* are by tradition herders but of late because of persistent drought in the area, some of them have taken up irrigated agriculture and cultivate maize, vegetables and fruits (Dahl 1996: 164). The most striking feature of the *Borana* is neither their pastoralist lifestyle nor their adaptation to agriculture in recent times, but their participatory culture of democracy. In describing their political system, Marco Bassi wrote:

> *Borana* polity, of which *gada* is only one component, may certainly be considered a democracy, if "democracy" is strictly taken in its classic meaning of "government of the people, by the people, for the people"…. (Bassi 1996: 159).

Members of the polity participate in the juridical and legislative efforts, a sure sign of its democratic nature with regard to division of powers and universal suffrage. It is a form of government that works in small and unstratified societies. There are three principal institutions in *Borana* political organization. They are the national assembly *(Gumi)*, the generational organization (*Gada*) and the dual organization (*Qallu*) (Legesse 2006: 97).

The national assembly – the *Gumi* (meaning the multitude) – is the most important institution. It is made up of many councilors, assemblies drawn from different sections of the *Gadaa* institution as well as ordinary citizens who have the ability to express their thoughts on matters of national concern and interest to travel to the site where the assembly is held (Ibid.). The one assembly that has survived to this day is the *Gumi Gayo* in *Borana*, southern Ethiopia, named after a famous well in the area. It is interesting to note that the *Gumi* broke up into regional assemblies during the great Oromo migration of the 16th Century and assemblies were held by different splinter communities in places like *Malka Bollo* (around Awash River) and in another place called *Tule* in Central and Western Ethiopia (Legesse 2006:

99). As distance and the large number of people involved became too unwieldy, the people created their own prototype assemblies so as not to lose the original spirit of such assemblies – i.e., popular democracy.

The other institution is the *Gadaa* (which is more like the government that enforces the laws passed by the *Gumi*). *Gadaa* is a generational organization. In the words of Legesse, in the *Gadaa* system, "all generations take turns in assuming the authority and responsibility to perform domestic labor, take part in wars, lead their people, make laws, mediate or adjudicate conflicts, and during their partial retirement, sit in judgment of the ruling *gada* class, give legislative leadership to their people and end the life cycle in a sacred state" (Legesse 2006: 128). For Legesse, *Gadaa* is "an effective method of distributing authority and responsibility across the whole life course' and helps the *Borana* society in attaining 'intergenerational equity and separation of powers on a sequential scale" (Legesse 2006: 128).

In the *Gadaa* system, every one has a role appropriate to his age. Every one passes through generation grades: *Dabballe* I (childhood), Junior *Gamme* II (the age of looking after livestock), Senior *Gamme* III (the age of initiation and the period during which the boys elect their six leaders to practice political leadership), *Cusa* IV (apprentice warriors), *Raba* V (the age of warriors), *Gadaa* VI (the age of assumption of political power) (Legesse 2006: 124-125).

The leader of the *Gadaa* class in power is known as the *Abbaa Gadaa* or *Abbaa Bokku* (father of the *Gadaa* or Father of the Scepter). He is democratically elected (see Appendix for Abba *Gadaas* of *Borana* since 1659). The *Gadaa* class remains in power for eight years. They assume power at a designated place called *Nura* and designated time, a transfer of power from one *Gadaa* class to another is effected in ceremony known as balli-wal-irra fudhani or the 'transfer of ostrich feathers' – a symbol of authority (see Appendix) (Legesse 2006: 125).

After the six grades mentioned above, there are four grades (VII to X), collectively known as *Yuba*. These are periods of partial retirement from active political leadership. The members continue to play some roles but their activities are greatly restricted. They are not actively involved in the day-to-day political government but they play an important role during the national assembly conventions (Legesse 2006: 126).

The third institution – the *Qallu* – is a ritual institution representing the two great societal halves of the *Borana* nation. The *Qallu* are hereditary and hold office for life. They are empowered to oversee the election of *Gadaa* leaders but they and their kin are barred from holding such office (the Oromo version of separation of state and religion). They are not allowed to bear arms or shed blood (Legesse 2006: 101), for men who communicate with God have no business carrying arms or shedding blood.

In *Borana* political system, participation is built into and permeates the whole system. The *Gumi*, as indicated before, personifies the culmination of a societal culture that puts a premium upon participation.

Gadaa itself is an embodiment of a culture that allows a person to participate in all the phases of generational roles, including assuming the highest responsibility of holding political leadership in the society. Legesse sums up the political philosophy underpinning *Borana* polity in the following words:

> At no point… does *Borana* society wholly transfer authority to any group of people. The society delegates limited kinds of powers to the leaders of a *luba* [*Gada*], for a limited period of time, but that power is always subject to the higher authority of the assembled multitudes.[2] (Legesse 2006: 126)

ROUSSEAU'S CONCEPTION OF POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY AND GENERAL WILL

The general will is one of the central concepts in Rousseau's political philosophy. It is the fountain of his theory of sovereignty. When the general will is declared, it becomes an act of sovereignty and constitutes law:

> For either the will is general, or it is not. It is the will of either the people as a whole or of only a part. In the first case, this declared will is an act of sovereignty and constitutes law. In the second case, it is merely a private will, or an act of magistracy. At most it is a decree (Rousseau 1987: 154).

Just what the general will means has been a subject of some debate. A number of scholars have criticized Rousseau's theory of general will for its obscurity and impracticality. Plamenatz, for instance, writes:

> If we take some of Rousseau's more often quoted statements literally and try to elicit their meanings, we soon find ourselves caught up in a web of absurdity. For example, his distinction of the 'will of all' from 'the general will', saying that the first is the 'sum of particular wills', and the second the 'sum of differences' remaining when the pluses and the minuses of the particular wills cancel each other out.… (Plamenatz 1963: 393).

---

[2] The power of the multitudes sometimes entails 'removal' of those who abuse their powers through proceedings which resemble modern impeachment proceedings. The word the *Borana* use to describe the removal of incompetent, unjust, abusive, or otherwise morally deficient officers is '*buqqisu*', which literally translates as 'to uproot', designating the supreme authority of the people to remove those who stand to abuse their powers; (See Legesse 2006: 126)

Here Plamentaz shows the difficulty of finding out whether the general will is just what is common to all the members or whether it is the sum of the differences. These show that Rousseau was not able to deliver a clear meaning of the general will.

Chester Maxey similarly puzzles about Rousseau's sovereignty:

> How could sovereignty ever be anything but an abstraction? Could the whole people ever be assembled? If assembled, could they agree as to what should constitute the general will? If unanimous agreement was impossible, could a majority bind the minority? If so, how could it be contended that sovereignty belonged only to the people as a whole or that law was exclusively an act of the general will (Maxey 2007: 362)?

Although Rousseau's contribution of a theory of general will is obscure, his underlying assumptions and the sympathies which led him to construct his theory are not in doubt.

Rousseau had nothing but contempt for representative democracy and he wrote passionately against the latter's tendency to legislate the particular wills of the few for the many, who are disenfranchised in the name of democracy. In Book III, Chapter XV of his *Social Contract*, Rousseau sneers at the democratic pretensions of countries like England, which subscribed to the representative version of democracy:

> Any law that the populace has not ratified in person is null; it is not a law at all. The English people believes itself to be free. It is greatly mistaken; it is free only during the election of the members of the parliament. Once they are elected, the populace is enslaved; it is nothing. The use the English people makes of that freedom in the brief moments of its liberty certainly warrants their losing it (Rousseau 1987: 198).

In a more blunt passage, Rousseau mocks the moderns of his time who believed themselves to be free:

> … As for you, modern peoples, you do not have slaves, but you yourselves are slaves. You pay for their liberty with your own. It is in vain that you crow about that preference. I find more cowardice in it than humanity. I do not mean by this that having slaves is necessary, nor that the right of slavery is legitimate, for I have proved the contrary. I am merely stating the reasons why modern peoples who believe themselves free have representatives, and why ancient peoples did not have them. Be that as it may, the moment a people gives itself representatives, it is no longer free; it no longer exists (ibid. 199).

For Rousseau, "sovereignty is merely the exercise of the general will" and this should neither be alienated nor be represented by 'anything but itself" (Rousseau, 153). Rousseau obviously believed that direct democracy was possible and the ancient popular democracies could be resurrected. An appeal to popular democracy might have been dismissed as a chimera at his time, but it was realized two thousand years ago before his time, and Rousseau did not believe that human nature changed so much as to rule out popular democracy.

At a time when direct democracy was dismissed as 'utopian' (in other words an impossibility), Rousseau's appeal for that type of democracy is striking for its boldness. However we may wish to see it, Rousseau was not willing to surrender citizens' right to participate. No evidence of 'impracticality' or even 'impossibility' argument could have dissuaded him from pursuing the path that, in his mind, led to the true democracy – popular democracy. "The populace" says Rousseau "itself cannot, even if it wanted to, deprive itself of this incommunicable right." For Rousseau, liberty is a supreme virtue, and if the population has to assemble constantly at public squares (like the ancient Greeks), so be it.

At what cost could popular democracy be achieved for Rousseau? First of all, where do we (so busy with distractions of this world) find the time to fully participate in popular assemblies? Secondly, how does one overcome the logistical challenges of participation in large states with millions of people scattered all over the place? These are and have been vexing questions for those drawn to the political philosophies of Rousseau. Let's address ourselves to the second question.

There is no doubt that Rousseau's sympathies lay with small states and communities not just because he admired the ancient city democracies but also because he was concerned about the practical challenges of his theory. The number of its inhabitants makes it easy for its members to meet, discuss and decide. It is organized around the ideas and values of simplicity. Equality both in terms of position and possession is vital. The absence of luxury is another important idea. Rousseau favors a small community in which neither wealth nor fame/glory corrupts its members. Elsewhere he writes: "All things considered, I do not see that it is possible … for the sovereign to preserve among us the exercise of its rights, unless the city is very small (ibid. 199)".

Since Rousseau wrote his theory surrounded by large states tending to grow even larger, he was not unaware of the difficulties of translating his political philosophy in the arena of large states. Rousseau was not intent upon providing a justificatory political philosophy for the existing states (his was not a vindication of the existing political order, unlike Filmer, or even Locke, for example). He anticipated the call of Karl Marx for philosophers: "to change the world," not "to interpret it."

In responding to the first challenge of translating Rousseau's political philosophy on the ground, i.e., the question of time, I think one needs to look at the kind of man Rousseau considered complete:

This passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces quite a remarkable change in man, or it substitutes justice for instinct in his behavior, and gives his actions a moral quality they previously lacked. Only then, when the voice of duty replaces physical impulse and right replaces appetite, does man, who had hitherto taken only himself into account, find himself forced to act upon other principles and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations … he ought constantly to bless the happy moment that pulled him away from it forever and which transformed from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man (ibid. 151).

Rousseau's *homo politicus* is not the individual who wishes to be left alone, as in the case of Locke or Mill. He rather prefers a society in which participation in the political process is indispensable. The happiness of the community must be given precedence over that of the individual. The freedom and security derived from a communal life based on participation and equality is more meaningful than the right of the individual. Self-government based on participation of the members is the key to Rousseau's community.

If one is to make sense of Rousseau's political philosophy as a guide for practical politics (not to get blood out of a stone, as Plamenatz says),[3] one must seek ways of rescuing his theories from disuse, and even worse, abuse.

Rousseau, we should remember, writes about legislation in two senses. The first sense in which he uses is the original social contract that creates the state. In this Rousseau simply reiterates the famous principle of contract that a contract is a law as between the parties that have signed up to it (*pacta sunt servanda*). His famous remark that those who disobey the general will should be forced to be free is in that context not as draconian as it appears at first sight.

The second sense is what, in Rousseau's words, gives "it [the social compact] movement and will" (Rousseau 160). I am interested in the second type of legislation: the form it might take when taken on the ground. For the first one, I can only repeat what Gloucester in Shakespeare's King Lear says of his 'bastard' son: "I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper." As far as I am concerned, the birth of states is immaterial as long as they turn out well, and it does not really matter how proper the birth of states was if they turned out bad.

---

[3] Plamenatz writes "It is certainly a good rule to take the theory you are studying seriously; but that… need not involve trying to get blood out of a stone. … Do what you like with it, you will get no pearls of political wisdom out of it" (Plamenatz 1963: 394)

"A SOCIETY OF ASSEMBLIES": THE *GUMI GAYO* (THE ASSEMBLY OF THE MULTITUDE) AND OTHER ASSEMBLIES

> The sovereign, having no other force than legislative power, acts only through the laws. And since the laws are only authentic acts of the general will, the sovereign can act only when the populace is assembled. With the populace assembled, it will be said: what a chimera! It is a chimera today, but two thousand years ago it was not. Have men changed their nature? (ibid. 195)

The *Gumi Gayo* (literally the Assembly at) is a body that makes or abrogates laws and adjudicates cases of conflict that cannot be resolved at lower levels (Legesse 2006: 210). Legesse describes the position of the *Gumi Gayo* in the following words:

> In Oromo democratic traditions, the highest authority does not reside in the great lawmakers who are celebrated by the people, nor the rulers who are elected to govern for eight years, nor the electors and ritual leaders who hold their office for life by hereditary right, nor the age-sets and age-regiments who furnish the military force, nor the *abba dula* who lead their people in battle. It resides, instead, in the open, national assembly, at which all *Gada* councils and assemblies, aspirant and in power, active and retired, are represented, and the *Warra Qallu,* the electors, participate as observers. The meetings that take place every eight years review the conduct of the ruling *Gada* council, punish any violators of law, remove any or all of them from office, should that become necessary.… The primary purpose of the meetings of the national assembly, however, is to re-examine the laws of the land, to reiterate them in public, to make new laws if necessary, and to settle disputes that were not resolved by lower levels in their judicial organization (ibid. 211).

To qualify as Rousseau's sovereign the *Gumi* should allow every citizen to participate. Here is where the first challenge arises. Legesse writes that the Gumi is open to any citizen with views about the *Gadaa* class in power or about the laws of the land, who has the initiative and ability to articulate those views (ibid. 211). Even people from outside *Borana* who have the knowledge about and interest in their institutions would be welcome to participate in the *Gumi*.

When I went to *Borana* in 2006, I asked a well-known *Borana* 'man of knowledge' (*Hayyu*) who participated in this grand convention. The man of knowledge responded that the people of *Borana* (both in Kenya and Ethiopia) regarded the *Gumi Gayo* as a national holiday to look forward to and every one (except the aged and the sick) went there. I asked another question:– is every one (having gone there) allowed to participate, including

women? To which he responded "women are not allowed to participate, but they are often powerful behind the scenes because they exert great influence over men, particularly their husbands." Remarkable as the *Gumi Gayo* is, it still fell short in terms of gender inclusivity- then again so did ancient Greece.[4]

The *pre-Gumi* meeting may last for as long as a month to hammer out the main issues and propositions (hence the eight year interval between the assemblies). At the main meetings, the discussions are dominated by the *Raba-Gadaa* leaders and the assembly men of the semi-retired *Gadaa* classes (ibid. 212). Others do not have the right to participate at this stage but they can speak through the *Gadaa* representatives with whom they had shared their thoughts in advance. There is a third level meeting called '*Gumi el Dallo'* (held in the vicinity of another great well called '*Dallo'*). Here is where the outstanding decisions of the Gumi are finalized and proclaimed as laws of the people (ibid.). Here we have a traditional model of democracy which operates at three levels, only the first of which could be called truly popular while the other two are conducted through representatives (I can imagine Rousseau losing interest already!) The *Borana* are perhaps unique in the annals of human history for consecrating shrines (their great wells – the source of sustenance of life) to the making of legislation, not to the worship of some gods.

MANAGEMENT OF *GUMI GAYO*

Apart from the large number of people involved in the *Gumi Gayo*, there are other challenges which can only be overcome through well-developed rules of procedure. The first procedural challenge is that there is no concept of a 'quorum' in *Gumi Gayo* conventions (ibid.). The second challenge is that decisions are not passed by majority that can impose its will on the minority. Discussions must go on until a consensus is reached by all members, so seriously do the *Borana* take the right of everyone to participate (ibid.).

How are these challenges of the Gumi overcome? Legesse notes that managing the assembly requires knowledge of laws, rituals, *Gadaa* history, chronology and time-reckoning. If the members do not have the knowledge, they seek the advice of the men of knowledge.

Secondly, effective methods of pressuring the participants in *Gumi Gayo* have been developed. One such method is the exhortation to refrain from adversarial language during the debates (Ibid.). Participants are

---

[4] Among some commentators, there is a tendency to judge the *Gadaa* system with the hard lens of modern form of democracy, and some people have committed the error of condemning the whole edifice of the *Gadaa* system because it does not meet the modern 'hard-won' equalities for women. This, it must be submitted, is as wrong as throwing the baby with the bath water.

reminded at the beginning of the assembly that the assembly is not a place for clever disputation and sophistry. Attempts to pull rank or resorts to self-praise are discouraged. According to Legesse, the presiding *Gadaa* officer starts the assembly by saying the following:

Dubbin dubbi Gumi Gayooti
Our talk is that of Gumi Gayo

Dubbin dubbi Gumiiti
Our talk is the affair of the multitudes

Dubbi qorumman dubbatani mit
This is not the place for clever talk

Warri qaro qarumman laf keyyadha
Clever people! Leave cleverness behind.

Fula tun, fula wan adaa dubbatan male
This is the place for discourse on custom

Fula qarumman dubbatani miti
It is not the place for clever talk

"An hayyu, an qaro, an duressa" wabeeka jedhani
Some [people] may want to brag: "I am knowledgeable, I am clever, I am rich" and so on;

Dubbi akkas akka hin jiranne
Such talk is not allowed here

Dubbi kara adaati
[our] talk is [about] the path of custom;

nam ada ch'aqasa!
Listen to those who speak of custom! (Ibid. 213, with author's modifications)

These appeals to the Convention to refrain from provocative and rancorous language are deliberately intended to calm down passions so that consensus would be possible. The signal that a consensus is about to be reached is sent by the 'father of laws', who presides over the meetings, when he is ready to formulate a decision that might be acceptable to most of the participants. If that is acceptable to the rest, he asks members if they are ready to reach a consensus. If the assembled multitude overwhelmingly responds with "Peace! Peace! Peace!" it means that there is a meeting of minds. If not, the debate continues until a consensus is reached (Ibid. 213-

14). It does not mean that dissenters are not allowed to voice their dissent, but pressures are applied upon dissenters by chanting "Bless! Bless! Bless!" and these rituals usually end up in the submission of the dissenters (ibid.).

Now that the procedures of *Gumi Gayo* are outlined, the differences between *Gumi* as an expression of popular democracy and the standards laid down by Rousseau should become clearer.

First of all, the *Gumi* is not just a legislative body. It is also involved in an adjudication of outstanding conflicts not settled by other bodies of *Borana* political system. Rousseau famously proscribed the involvement of a sovereign body in adjudication of particular cases because to him, the sovereign body loses its general character when entangling itself in particular issues and cases.

Secondly, the Gumi, although it starts its proceedings with all the 'citizens' of *Borana*, its later deliberations are dominated by *Gadaa* councilors. The early (so-called pre-Gumi) proceedings may meet Rousseau's stringent standards but the later stages may violate his injunctions against surrender of any legislative authority to a representative body.

Are *Gumi's* proceedings any worse for that? Not at all. These communities have gone as far as they could go in giving their people a voice in the legislative process. When everyone around them succumbed to various forms of autocratic governments, they followed a unique political system which accepted the natural goodness of an ordinary citizen and took his views into account. If the type of laws they have passed over the years is anything to go by, it is fair to conclude that the quality of their laws is in large measure the product of the wide-ranging discussions they incorporated into their law making process.

I have described the *Gumi Gayo* as an example of Rousseau's popular democracy in *Borana* (it is certainly the supreme body on pan-*Borana* matters). According to the *Borana* political tradition, what the *Gumi* decides cannot be reversed by any other assembly (Legesse 1973: 93). But it must be remembered that there are several other assemblies which make binding decisions concerning virtually all spheres of life (Bassi 1996: 153). These assemblies involve different groups depending on the nature of issues and they make decisions such as money and cattle collections for collective investments or for assisting the needy, arrangements on management and use of natural resources and juridical proceedings (ibid.). The decisions taken during an assembly can only involve the members of the community concerned with that specific assembly and all binding decisions are reached through consensus (ibid. 153-54). It is this political phenomenon of the *Borana* that led Marco Bassi to refer to the Oromo society as "una societa assembleare" or a society of assemblies (in Legesse 2006: 215).

ROUSSEAU'S LEGISLATOR AND *BORANA* LEGISLATORS

Several political philosophers have cast doubt about the ability of the

average citizen in matters political. Plato was led to a rule by philosopher-kings in part because of his ambivalence about the ability of the people to govern themselves (Hacker 2006: 323). Even Rousseau, the great champion of the natural goodness of the average citizen, could not resist a condescending statement at times: "How will a blind multitude, which often does not know what it wants (since it rarely knows what is good for it), carry out on its own an enterprise as great and as difficult as a system of legislation?" (Rousseau 1987: 162)

For Rousseau, the general will, the source of laws, inheres in the people but in the apt expression of Andrew Hacker "at the collective unconscious" (Hacker was instructively employing Freudian language to make sense of Rousseau) (Hacker 2006: 323). This collective unconscious needs an articulator- whom Rousseau calls legislator.

 By what oracular powers the legislator unlocks and reads the general will, Rousseau does not say. He attributes it to near mystical powers of the legislator. "Gods would be needed to give men laws," he says. Nonetheless, the position of the legislator in Rousseau's political system is not as exalted as the position of philosopher-kings in Plato, for example. Rousseau's legislator is a person with a power to 'compel without violence and persuade without convincing.'(ibid. 164)

"The office of the legislator" says Rousseau, "is neither magistracy nor sovereignty" (Ibid. 163). In another memorable passage, Rousseau says "he who has command over the laws [the legislator] must not have command over men" (ibid.). Rousseau insisted that the legislator must not be entangled in the government of the people because he feared that the legislator so involved would use his "office to perpetuate injustices" and allow his "private opinions" to taint "the sanctity of his work."(ibid.).

The legislator draws up the laws and will have no business getting the law passed. "He who frames the laws," says Rousseau "does not or should not have any legislative right."(ibid. 164) "The populace cannot, even if it wanted to, deprive itself of this incommunicable right, because according to the fundamental compact, only the general will obligates private individuals and there can never be any assurance that a private will is in conformity with the general will until it has been submitted to the free vote of the people."(ibid.).

In order to ensure that the legislator remains detached from government over men, Rousseau would be content to have the legislator abdicate his office (as Lycurgus was said to have done) or even come from a foreign country as was the custom in ancient Greek towns and the Republics of modern Italy and Geneva.(see ibid. 163-164)

It is not altogether clear in Rousseau's philosophy at what point the legislator should stop and let the people decide because the legislator must communicate the laws he has drawn to the people (or assembly of people). At what point is the legislator going too far? Rousseau wants his legislator to master the arts of persuasion, blend fact with fiction, reason and emotion, science and myth (Hacker 2006: 325). It is unclear how the legislator who

employs these 'tricks' would remain faithful to the general will, granted that the latter can be known. In a romantic like Rousseau, however, that kind of ambiguous language may be excused. Rousseau was seeking to achieve rational legislation and at the same time leave ultimate power in the hands of the people (ibid.). We can cavil endlessly about the possibilities of that but it is at this point unnecessary.

Let us now come to the traditional polity and examine the role of *Borana* legislators (obviously that is not the word they use). The *Gumi Gayo*, being an assembly of a large number of people, requires a management by individuals who possess knowledge of the laws, rituals, history, chronology and time reckoning (Legesse 2006: 211). A tradition has been developed, therefore, to seek the advice of men of knowledge. Rousseau mentions Lycurgus as a paragon of legislators in history, and among the *Borana,* there have been renowned legislators of similar stature. According to Legesse, one such legislator active in the 50's and 60's is a man of knowledge named Arero Rammata, who was said to have the entire *Gadaa* chronology – three hundred and sixty years of history stored in his mind (ibid. 131). A mathematician named M. Ascher used Rammata's knowledge to examine the nature of mathematical concepts and techniques of reckoning in non-Western communities and archaeo-astronomers, B. M. Lynch and L. Doyle used Rammata's extensive knowledge to confirm that the *Borana* calendar is based on a clear understanding of lunar motion.

Rousseau says that "the legislator is in every respect an extraordinary man in the state" and Rammata meets that profile. Rousseau also says that if a great prince is a rare man, a great legislator is even rarer. Legesse cites two well-known legislators from Oromo history: Dawwe Gobbo (of *Borana*) and Makko Billi of Macha (western Oromia) (ibid. 209). These two men were credited with formulating the fundamental laws that stood the test of time, such as the *Gadaa* system itself.

An interesting feature of the *Borana* political organization is that the *Yuba* class becomes most active during the *Gumi Gayo* conventions at a time of their life when they retire from active political leadership in *Gadaa* (ibid. 99). Because of the enormous knowledge they accumulate in their previous leadership, their influence in directing the *Gumi* convention and in formulating the right kind of laws is undeniable. Rousseau, it must be remembered, wanted his legislators to follow the example of Lycurgus: resign from office to occupy a more exalted position of a legislator. In the *Borana* political system, that philosophy seems to be built into the system.

That said, the similarities of legislators as Rousseau imagined them in his *Social Contract* and as the *Borana* view theirs must not be carried too far. First of all, the legislators in the *Borana* political tradition are involved in the law-making process of the *Gumi* assembly (there is no way of going around it) although they are involved as individual citizens or members of the multitude. In his insistence that those who frame the laws shall have no dominion over men, Rousseau might consider that as going too far. *Borana* legislators are retired from *Gadaa* (Government) leadership and not from

the influence of legislation. That is why they are deemed semi-retired *(Yuba)*.

Secondly, there are or might be other legislators from active *Gadaa* classes. Some indeed became great legislators in the tradition during their active leadership in government – *Dawwe Gobbo* and *Mako Bili* were two prominent examples. That is because the *Gadaa* classes are also involved in the deliberations of the *Gumi* like all other citizens of *Borana*. This gives them an opportunity to show their mettle during the deliberations, but they must submit their proposals to the *Gumi*.

Although Rousseau approves of legislators having recourse to the intervention of heaven and to crediting the gods with their own wisdom, the *Borana* are usually suspicious of those who invoke the name of God to persuade them.[5] The *Borana* listen to their legislators but do not worship them. The *Borana* generally admire men of knowledge but usually with rational detachment. Their legislators 'are not bearded old patriarchs with divine inspiration but gifted parliamentarians (sic) known for their wisdom and/or eloquence' (ibid. 209). The evidence for that is that the legislators were not always accepted. In one instance, *Dawwe Gobbo* proposed a law that proscribed the keeping of lovers within a moiety but was rejected by the Gumi (the *Borana* had a law which proscribed marriage within a moiety but keeping of lovers was allowed). When I traveled to *Borana*, I was informed by a well-known contemporary legislator that this law which was passed back in the 18th century was being reconsidered for revision in the upcoming Gumi because of the threat of HIV/AIDS epidemic. Times change, and the *Borana* change with it.

CONCLUSION

In Book II, Chapter X of his *Social Contract*, Rousseau expressed the fear that the general will and popular sovereignty faced continual threats from particular wills (Rousseau 1987: 192). In the absence of a corporate will to counterbalance and resist the particular will of those in government, Rousseau said the sovereign people will finally succumb to tyranny (Ibid.). It is disheartening to read the pessimism of Rousseau in this regard. The canker of vice in the body politic, for Rousseau, is as natural as old age and death are to a human body, leading to the degeneration of popular democracy.

Modern governments fiercely fight counterfeit money through their criminal justice systems. But they do not show half the effort to restrain

---

[5] Of this Legesse writes: "Several ethnographic facts lead me to believe that the Oromo conception of authority is not as awesome as it is among their monarchic neighbors to the north and west. Neither God, nor the *Kallu*, nor the *Abba Gada* are conceptualized in the language of pious dependence that is pervasive in monarchic cultures." (Legesse 1973: 44)

themselves from counterfeiting what is currently a fashionable political currency: democracy. Popular democracy has been a subject of much abuse in the hands of unscrupulous government functionaries as much as representative democracy. It is a matter of recent memory to us how many cadres in the name of communism re-enacted the human comedy of 'popular democracy' through their tedious town and rural meetings and assemblies where people are always used as alibis.

If popular democracy inevitably hurtles towards degeneracy, it is quite remarkable that the *Borana* have preserved their popular institutions all these centuries. What is interesting about the *Borana* is that they have developed two versions of a democracy. They have institutions for popular democracy (like the *Gumi Gayo*) and they have institutions for representative democracy (like *Gadaa*). This is a remarkable political tradition that is worth preserving. Rousseau was right in concluding that "one people lends itself to discipline at its inception; another not even after ten centuries" (ibid. 163). The *Borana* are one such people who have had the discipline to choose democracy over aristocracy, plutocracy, autocracy and all the other "cracies" in the book. This is not to say that the *Borana* are perfect in every way – perfection is not given to humans. Throughout the 20th Century when their system of government was threatened from the modern administration of Ethiopian governments, the *Borana* have managed to preserve their democracy by keeping modern bureaucracy at bay (fewer crimes are committed in *Borana* areas and when they happen, the *Borana* exert a maximum effort to settle disputes out of court (i.e., traditionally). The political functionaries of the Ethiopian Government are at times bemused by this tenacity of the *Borana* (while secretly admiring their peaceful lifestyle) but the *Borana* know that their traditional institutions are superior (in goodness and credentials of democratic participation) to all modern governments around them.

The question is how long can the *Borana* manage to keep degeneration at bay? How long before they succumb to tyranny? Unfortunately, even the triumphant liberal democracy, which impudently announces the 'end of history'', marches and leaves in its wake ruins of not just dictatorships, autocracies and monarchies but also authentic traditional democracies like that of *Borana* because there is little hope that the harbingers of this democracy will stop and pay homage to the tradition even when that tradition announced the triumph of a different brand of democracy long before democracy became fashionable throughout the world. Evidence for this claim is that scholars like Fukuyama had the audacity to claim that before 1776 there was not a single democracy in existence anywhere in the world (Fukuyama 1992: 48).

Finally, it is interesting to note that Rousseau, who railed against the corrupting influences of science and art in his First Discourse, showed so much admiration for simple societies. That the spirit of Rousseau is alive in the political traditions of simple societies like the *Borana* tempts one to

believe that his *Social Contract* is a continuation of his basic philosophy expressed in his First Discourse.

REFERENCES

Bassi, Marco. 1996. "Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of Gada" in Baxter P. T., Jan Hultin and Allessandro Truilzi (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiry*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

Baxter P. T., Jan Hultin and Allessandro Truilzi (eds.), 1996. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiry*. Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press.

Copelston, Frederick. S. J. 1960. *A History of Philosophy*: *Wolff to Kant*, Vol. VI.

Dahl, Gudrun. 1996. "Sources of Life and Identity" in Baxter P. T., Jan Hultin and Allessandro Truilzi (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiry*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.

Hacker, Andrew. 2006. *Political Theory: Philosophy, Ideology, Science.* Delhi: Surjeet Publications.

Helland, Johan. 1996. "The Political Viability of *Borana* Pastoralism: a Discussion of Some Features of the Political System of *Borana* Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia" in Baxter P. T., Jan Hultin and Allessandro Truilzi (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiry*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

Legesse, Asmarom. 2006. *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

_____. 1973. *Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. New York: The Free Press.

Maxey, Chester, C. 2007. *Political Philosophies*. Delhi: Surjeet Publications.

Plamenatz, John. 1963. *Man and Society: A Critical Examination of Some Important Social and Political Theories from Machiavelli to Marx*. Vol. I. UK: Essex.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1987. *The Basic Political Writings*. Translated by Donald A. Cress, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abba Dulaa – war chief
Abba Gadaa – elected leader of the Gadaa system
Gadaa – a system of classes (luba) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities
Hayyu – man of knowledge

Qaalluu – the ritual leader of the *Borana* (hereditary)
Warra Qaalluu – the Qaallu clan
Raaba **–** Warrior Class
Yuba – the stage of partial retirement. It covers a hypothetical life cycle
from the 53rd year to the 80th year. The Yuba class retains 'advisory authorit

APPENDIX

Table: Abba Gadaas of the Borana since 1659

No.	Name of Abba Gada	Period	No.	Name of Abba Gada	Period
1	Abbu Lakhu	1659-1667	24	Madha Boru	1837-1845
2	Abbayyi Babbo	1667-1674	25	Liban Jilo	1845-1852
3	Alle Kura	1674-1682	26	Jaldessa Guyo Debbasa	1852-1860
4	Wayyu Uru	1682-1690	27	Doyyo Jilo	1860-1868
5	Morrowwa Abbayye	1690-1698	28	Haro Adi	1868-1876
6	Gobba Alla	1698-1705	29	Dida Bittata	1876-1883
7	Dawwe Gobbo	1706-1714	30	Guyyo Boru Ingule	1885-1891
8	Jarso Iddo	1714-1722	31	Liban Jaldessa	1891-1899
9	Wale Wacch'u	1722-1730	32	Adi Doyyo	1899-1906
10	Sora Dhaddacha	1730-1737	33	Boru Galma	1906-1913
11	Dhaddacha Wayyu	1737-1745	34	Liban Kuse	1913-1921
12	Halakke Doyyo	1745-1753	35	Arero Gedo	1921-1929
13	Guyo Gedo	1753-1761	36	Bule Dabbasa	1929-1936
14	Madhu Boru Dadoye	1761-1768	37	Aga Adi	1936-1944
15	Dhaddacha Oda Morrowa	1768-1776	38	Guyyo Boru	1944-1952
16	Bule Dhaddacha	1776-1783	39	Madha Galma	1952-1960
17	Liban Wata	1783-	40	Jaldessa Liban	1960-1968

		1790			
18	Wayyu Ralle	1791-1798	41	Gobba Bule	1968-1976
19	Boru Madha	1798-1806	42	Jilo Aga	1976-1984
20	Ingule Halakhe	1806-1814	43	Boru Guyyo	1984-1992
21	Saqo Dhaddacha	1814-1821	44	Galma Madha	1992-2000
22	Jilo Niencho	1821-1829	45	Liban Jaldessa	2000-2008
23	Sokhore Anna	1829-1837			

Source: Asmarom Legesse, Oromo Democracy, Appendix I, p. 267

SECTION IV

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

CHAPTER VIII

ENCOUNTER OF THE OROMO RELIGION WITH EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY: A LOOK AT THE MEANING OF CONVERSION

EZEKIEL GEBISSA

For at least the last four decades Africanists have been engaged in a lively scholarly discourse centered on the questions of why and how world religions expanded at the expense of African indigenous religions.[1] The explanations rely mostly on two models of conversion. The first, promoted by Robin Horton, assumes African conversion to world or missionary religions was the result of Africa's widening political, economic, and cultural frontiers which followed the continent's contact with and integration into the modern world. According to this view, the Africans' expanded sociocultural interactions required an enlarged cosmology and revised morality that the universalistic doctrines of the world religions offered. Conversion resulted from Africans' moving out of their hitherto insulated homogenous communities (microcosm), where local spirits controlled events, to an expanded world (macrocosm) under the reign of a supreme deity. In this sense, conversion is the result of the Africans' choice of a different cosmology in which missionaries served only as facilitators in accelerating changes that were already underway (Horton 1971; Horton 1975).

The second model, enunciated by Humphrey Fisher, criticizes Horton's model for placing too much emphasis on the adaptive capacity of indigenous religious thought and underestimating the role of external agencies, thus ignoring the fact that the broader worldview of the missionary religions creates its own "juggernaut" that allows religious conversion to proceed under its own momentum (Fisher 1985). His alternative model conceptualizes conversion as a three-stage process in which Africans first 'quarantined' outside religions, then mixed their former belief system with the new, and finally initiated reforms to purge religious practices that were found to be inconsistent with the basic tenets

---

[1] The focus on conversion to world religions is perhaps due to a persistent assumption first enunciated by early missionaries that African indigenous religions were static faith systems that thrive only within homogenous communities and were handed down virtually intact through generations. Religious change is said to have occurred only in connection with the encounter of the indigenous religions with missionary religions, mainly Christianity and Islam (Booth 1991:1-11; Mbiti 1990: 3).

of their new faith (Fisher 1973). Other opponents of Horton fault his theory as too deterministic, due to its emphasis on a predictable unidirectional religious change (Ikenga-Metuh 1987), and as too intellectualistic, due to its neglect of political and socioeconomic influences on conversion that materially affect the convert (Ifeka-Moller 1974; Comaroff 1985). Still others stress that African societies have in fact always been aware of a "High God" whom they invoked when occasions demanded (Mbiti 1980; Idowu 1973; Idowu 1967).

In assessing conversion later scholars favor giving priority to the Africans' own experience at the local level – their goals, motivations, and strategies – to better understand patterns of religious change rather than overemphasizing the macrocosmic context. Lamin Sanneh, for instance, contends that from the Africans' religious perspective conversion to a world religion signifies very little or no change at all (Sanneh 2003). John Peel argues that studies of religious conversion ought to investigate not just how Africans became Christian but also how Christianity became African (Peel 2000). Other studies of conversion focus on religious diversification and multi-causality of conversion (Ikenga-Metuh 1987).

In Ethiopia, the scholarly literature on religious change seemed unaffected by the contemporaneous debate in the rest of Africa, providing descriptive accounts of conversion from indigenous faith traditions to the monotheistic world religions (Trimingham, 1952; Tamrat 1972; Crummey 1970; Arén 1978; Kaplan 1984). A review of the literature on the subject by Steven Kaplan acknowledges that the studies on conversion are largely descriptions of the main actors, motives, patterns, and impact of incentives in the conversion process rather than causal explanations (Kaplan 2004). In recent years, however, several anthropologists have raised critical questions concerning patterns of conversion and the political economy and sociocultural contexts of conversion. These studies view the encounter between indigenous and missionary religions as a transformative space where the beliefs and practices of the advocate and potential convert intermesh and potentially where a hybrid that incorporates elements of both cultures emerges and evolves. This is shown in several studies exploring the conversion of the Sidama to evangelical Christianity (Hamer 2002), processes of religious syncretism in southern Ethiopia (Braukämper 1992), stages of conversion and resistance to conversion among the Kambbaata-Hadiiyya (Rønne 1997), and reexamination of Emperor Ezana's conversion to Christianity (Kaplan 1982).

This paper examines the dynamic and complex process of conversion of the Macca Oromo of Wallaga, Western Ethiopia, to Protestant Christianity with a goal of exploring the meaning of conversion of a people who had an indigenous religion with a complex theology and elaborate rituals. My explanation of the meaning of conversion among the Macca Oromo builds on a perspective first enunciated by Lambert Bartels, the pioneer scholar of Oromo religion. Based on his study of the Macca Oromo, he concluded that,

whether they became Christians or Muslims, the Oromo's traditional modes of experiencing the divine have continued almost unaffected, in spite of the fact that several rituals and social institutions in which it was expressed, have been very diminished or apparently submerged in new ritual cloaks (Bartels 1983: 15).

Indeed, the Oromo converts did not experience a shattering of their microcosmos or pressure to abandon *Waaqa*, the Oromo Supreme God. Conversion in their context portends more than continuity of religious beliefs and experiences. In the case of the Macca Oromo, I argue, conversion denotes the emergence of a variant of Christianity which I characterize as a blend of what European Protestant missionaries found in Oromo religion to be acceptable and what Oromos found in Protestant Christianity to be compatible with their indigenous religion. It was a beginning of religious exchange in which the Oromo accepted evangelical Christianity within the framework of religious concepts already inherent in their indigenous religion.

A FRAMEWORK OF UNDERSTANDING CONVERSION

Theoretical models are useful analytical tools in understanding patterns and processes, but no one particular model can explain the variety of ways in which individuals respond to the entreaties of an advocate of religious change. As Lewis Rambo notes, "no theoretical system has [ever] been able to choreograph all the salient features and forces operative in the critical encounter stage" (Rambo 1993: 88). In fact, a straightjacket application of a model is likely to have the effect of narrowing possibilities of investigating the phenomenon of conversion in its full complexity – sociological and historical, cultural and psychological. In the case of Oromo conversion to world religions, Mario Aguilar (1995) has shown that the conversion models of both Horton and Fisher are valid in explaining the experience of the Waso Boorana. This shows that the approach to religious conversion should be an eclectic one in which various models serve as complementary to each other.

Attempts to explain why the Macca Oromo accepted the Protestant faith should address a few concerns at the outset. The first is the extent to which political factors may have influenced the conversion of the Macca Oromo to Protestant Christianity in the nineteenth century.[2] This concern arises from an uncritical belief in the primacy of political factors to the extent of denying local agency and human ingenuity to make rational

---

[2] When I presented an earlier version of this chapter at the Philosophy in Africa Now Conference in Addis Ababa on June 21, 2010, Gemechu Megerssa and Tadesse Lencho insisted that power relations cannot be overlooked.

decisions even within constricted political spaces. In much of Africa, such factors as the establishment of colonial political and cultural domination, resistance to such domination, and other aspects of the power relations have indeed affected the rhythm of conversion and the institutionalization of religious innovation (Horton 1971; Mudimbe 1988; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991). But political contexts were not determinant given the fact that "Christian expansion [in Africa] occurred *after* rather than during colonialism" (Sanneh 2003: 18). In any event, the Macca Oromo's reaction to an evangelical Christianity that accompanied colonial rule could not be assumed to be a replication of the experience of Africans elsewhere. Acceptance or rejection is not always based on political coercion or calculation. In Igbo conversion, for instance, "inherent religious values are the determinants [rather than attendant political factors]" (Okoracha 1987: 209). Finally, power is located in and exercised through structures. As we will see shortly, the Oromo evangelists who brought the evangelical message to the Macca Oromo were outsiders to the Abyssinian power structures that prevailed in Wallaga in the nineteenth century.

It is vitally important to posit what is really meant by conversion in the case of the Macca Oromo. During the period following the encounter between the Macca Oromo and Protestant missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century, studies report the persistence of indigenous Oromo religious values among putative Oromo evangelical Christians (Bartels 1983; de Salviac 2005).[3] Trajectories of conversion for individual converts may differ but it is reasonable to assume conversion to evangelical Christianity occurred in stages. At the encounter the message is planted, it then germinates, gradually takes root, and eventually flourishes (cf. Rambo 1993: 87). For those Macca Oromo who respond positively, I argue, following Ikenga-Metuh (1987), conversion is a continuum involving three stages: adhesion without affiliation; affiliation without conviction; change of conviction from "mixed" to fervent Christianity (cf.; Fisher 1973: 31-32). The paper looks at the first two decades of the twentieth century, primarily at the stage of germination at which adhesion occurs, then partial taking root, whereby Oromos adopt Christian worship and rituals to their Oromo religious practices. This lays the foundation for understanding the flourishing phase, the fervent stage, by highlighting the ability of Oromos to make theologically rigorous Christianity their own.[4] In this, I follow

---

[3] Mohammed Hassen (1990: 152) has also identified "a series of gradations in the conversion of the Oromo [of the Gibe region] to Islam."

[4] This is similar to the process of "nostrification,"a concept adopted by Thomas Zitelman (2005: 81) to analyze Sufi Islamic influence on Oromo religion. Zeitelman defines nostrification as an Austro-German concept that "denotes the formal and informal processes of making something that is "foreign" into something that is "ours." This is a stage that will be dealt with in a future publication.

Lamin Sanneh's conceptual framework of conversion. In explaining the expansion of Christianity, he states:

> I have decided to give priority to indigenous response and local appropriation over against missionary transmission and direction, and accordingly have reversed the argument by speaking of the *indigenous discovery of Christianity* rather than the *Christian discovery of indigenous societies*. … The fact that Bible translation adopted into its canon the indigenous names of God … [has] opened the way for indigenous innovation and motivation in religious life. Accordingly, Olorun, the Yoruba high god, was adopted into Christianity with little diminution of his epiphanies in the Orisa as lesser divinities (Sanneh 2003: 10).

For the Macca Oromo, the same process began with the translation of God in the Oromo Bible as *Waaqa*, the appellation for the Oromo indigenous supreme deity. The fact of having scriptures in the vernacular provided a meeting space for religious exchange between the Protestant missionary and the Oromo potential convert.

In the process of the conversion of the Oromo, multiple factors were operating. In this paper, I will focus on three interrelated factors. First, translation of the Bible into vernacular Oromo made the Christian message accessible to potential Oromo converts. Second, the Oromo evaluated the religious message they had encountered intellectually and theologically and accepted what they found to be compatible with their own faith traditions. Third, the Oromo and the missionaries resolved differences through negotiations and validation of each others' worldviews, religious categories, and worship practices. Even the complicated issue of Jesus as fully human and fully divine, which is so central to the Protestant faith, resonated with aspects of the Oromo conception of the divine. Thus conversion to evangelical Christianity for the Oromo did not mean the replacement of the fundamentals of their indigenous religion but the validation and acceptance by missionaries of their revelation as Christian. I will begin with a discussion of how translation facilitated adhesion to the missionary faith.

TRANSLATING THE MESSAGE

Even when the power positions are unbalanced, conversion encounters must be viewed as two-sided. The message is transmitted either through *diffusion*, which makes the missionary culture the inseparable carrier of the messages, or *translation*, which makes the recipient culture the true and final locus of the proclamation, so that the religion arrives without the presumption of cultural rejection (Sanneh 1989: 29). In the latter case, the analysis deemphasizes what the missionaries themselves were doing and places the true agency with the receivers who not only heard but transformed and deepened the message in ways that often surprised and

shocked the missionaries themselves. According to Horton and Peel (1976: 482), people tend to understand new concepts in terms of what they already know and assimilate new ideas into preexisting frameworks.

Whether missionaries were aware of the importance of local languages and categories of interpretation in mediating conversion, they undertook translating scriptures into vernacular languages as the primary strategy of the missionary enterprise in Ethiopia. The translated scripture played a critical role in the conversion of the Macca Oromo to the Protestant faith. Beginning in the 1850s, the pace of translating scriptures into the Oromo language accelerated (Arén 1978: 93-94). In the 1860s, *Aleqa* Zenab, an Oromo-speaking clergyman from Ifat in Shewa and Emperor Tewodros's chronicler, apparently converted to the evangelical faith in 1859 while teaching Amharic to the missionaries and conducted bible studies among the emperor's Oromo soldiers, leading many of them to the evangelical faith (Arén 1978). In 1868, Zenab completed translation of the four gospels and sent the manuscript to Johann Ludwig Krapf of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) for publication. Two years later, he completed translation of the New Testament, assisted by young Oromo converts: Rufo, a native of Guma, and three young Oromos from Nonno, Solan, Waré, and Chagan, whose names are listed as Zenab's assistants on the cover page of the gospels which Krapf published in 1875 (Pankhurst, 1976: 202; Arén 1981: 8).

After Zenab's death in 1876, Onesimos Nesib stepped in to carry on the translation of scriptures to Oromo, publishing the first Oromo hymnbook in 1887, the New Testament in 1893, and the whole Bible in 1899. In translating the Bible to Oromo, Onesimos borrowed and coined terms for non-religious objects and practices that were not available in the Oromo language. As Terfasa Diga's study shows, he encountered "less of a problem in translating basic religious concepts into the Oromo language [and showed] willingness to draw on some of the religious way of life in the Oromo culture" (Diga 1999: 45). Thus he used the Oromo *Waaqa* to express the biblical concept of God, *luboota* to render the office of the Jewish priest or Christian pastor, and *ayyaana* to describe the grace of God. He also used such Oromo religious categories as *arsaa* or *qalma galata* (billowing smoke or slaughter of thanksgiving) for rendering sacrifice, *facaafacha* (sowing or spreading) for worship practices, *irrefachaa* (placing of gifts at shrines) for making an offering, *iddoo qalma* (place of slaughter) for altar and *dhagoota dhugaa* (rocks of truth) for the Ten Commandments, and *mana kadhata* (house of prayer) for church (Diga 1999: 45).

In using Oromo religious categories, Onesimos hoped that the people would come to understand the meaning of the Christian revelation he had accepted. However, as Øyvind Eide has rightly noted with respect to the Oromo term designating pastors, "Onesiimoos Nasib could not stop people from infusing the concept with a traditional understanding in spite of great efforts being made to create the wholly new concept of a Christian ministry

(Eide 2000: 75). The same is true for all the other Oromo religious concepts Onesimos employed in translating scriptures.

Nearly all of the indigenous Protestant missionaries who were involved in evangelizing (sharing the joy of the new revelation) the Oromo were in one way or another connected to Onesimos (Eide 2000: 51). Their ventures would not have succeeded, to the degree they did, without the scripture in the Oromo language. This was particularly true for the first successful missionary venture to Oromoland undertaken by an Orthodox clergyman named Gebre Ewostatewos, who learned the Oromo language from Onesimos Nesib specifically to read scriptures, and an Oromo named Daniel Dabala. On arrival in Naqamtee in 1898, the seat of the governor of Wallaga at the time, they met *Fitawrari* Dibaba, a provincial governor who was perhaps looking for a priest for an Orthodox church he had built in his capital of Boji Karkarrro, west of Naqamtee. The governor was nominally an Orthodox Christian, having been forced to embrace that faith by Emperor Menelik, but in practice, like many of his contemporaries, he had continued to practice the Oromo religion (Gidada & Crummey 1972:105). The meeting with Gebre Ewostatewos, who arrived equipped with an Oromo New Testament, was a turning point. Gustav Arén describes the encounter as follows:

> Gebre-Ewostatewos now produced his books in Oromo, read some portions from the New Testament and sang some hymns, for he had a beautiful voice. Dibaba marveled. He never imagined that it would be possible to use his own native language for sacred scriptures and Christian poetry. Excited, he offered the priest from Hamasen instant employment. *Dejazmach* Gebre-Egziabher consented, remarking that the clergy form Gojam would never permit the Oromo Holy Scriptures to be read in Naqamté Mariam (Arén 1978: 395-96).

It is clear that the delivery of the message in vernacular Oromo was determinant in grabbing Dibaba's attention. It was equally critical for the evangelization endeavors of the Oromo students of Gebre Ewostatewos and Daniel Dabala. Following in the footsteps of these pioneers, for instance, Samuel Danki and Boru Siba successfully led the effort to evangelize the Oromo in the villages of Allé Ambalto and Siban respectively and conducted general literacy work along with their evangelistic activities (Arén 1978: 401-03; Gurmessa 2009: 152-153). Given that Onesimos made use of Oromo religious concepts to convey the meanings of relevant Christian categories, it would be difficult to assume that the Oromo who responded positively to these advocates' entreaties were imagining that they were being asked to abandon their Oromo religion. They were able to adhere to the new faith without conviction and without affiliation. In practice, this means that people attend mission schools taking Bible lessons,

but they go back to their old religious practices and never feel any obligation to become church members.

The vernacular Bible was the single most important factor in the activities of another group of Oromo evangelical missionaries: Oromo freed slaves who attended the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) schools in Massawa and Imkulu on the Red Sea coast and Oromo traders who learned the gospel from Onesimos. Among these, Gebre Yesus Bambe in Naqamtee, Habte Mariam Kassa in Sadi in Qellem (western Wallaga), and Ayele Yimer in Boji and later in Sadi, carried out evangelistic endeavors in Oromoland. Onesimos and Aster preached in Naqamtee and Nejo between 1904 and 1905. Between 1903 and 1911, Feben and Ayele Yimer carried on the work of evangelizing in Boji which Daniel Dabala had started. They also worked in Qellem from 1911 to 1919, carrying on the evangelistic work that Habte Mariam Kassa earlier began in Sadi in Sayyo (Arén 1978; 412-430; Gurmessa 2009: 152-156). In all of these cases, the use of the vernacular looms large as the main catalyst for the eventual conversion of the majority of the Oromo in Wallaga (Eide 2000: 74).

Indigenous evangelists who learned the message in the Oromo language from the evangelists who followed the pioneers in turn proclaimed the gospel in areas around Naqamtee, Nejo, Boji, Sayyo, Mendi and Chalia in central Wallaga, and taught the people there how to read the Bible in the vernacular. The evangelization that was started by the Oromo evangelists brought forth converts such as Shuramo Yadessa, son of the governor of Sadi in Sayyo, who was instrumental in preaching the gospel in Mendi. He taught the gospel to Hunde Gutama, Irana Sarda, and Kenea Tesgera all of whom, in turn, traveled and preached with the same purpose throughout the villages between Mendi, Chalia and surrounding areas (Lundgren 1953: 144). Their success owes much to the appeal of the message in the vernacular as the testimony of Mathewos Chibsa, an early convert from Mendi, attests. He told his story to Eide as follows:

> When I was young my only ambition was to become an Amhara [alternatively Orthodox Christian]. But then I came across the Oromo Bible. Realizing that God talked to me in my own language, surprised me with joy, and changed my ambition completely. From now on my sole desire was to learn the word of God to bring it forth to my people (Eide 2000: 74).

Dibaba's experience occurred at the beginning and Mathewos' case at the end of the period of this chapter respectively. These and the other cases demonstrate that the Oromo Bible unleashed chain-reaction evangelism in which the Macca Oromo took to reading scriptures in their own language, rejoiced in the experience, and then resolved to share it with their kinfolk. Overall, it is important to note three things here. First, the translation was done entirely by Oromo converts with the missionaries' logistical assistance. Second, the gospel message was brought to the Oromo by

Oromo evangelists, long before European missionaries arrived (see Figure 1). The local Oromo, having heard the gospel message in their own language from their own kinsmen, embraced the new faith and the practice of reading the Oromo Bible with enthusiasm.

Figure 1: Flow Chart of Evangelical Expansion among the Macca Oromo
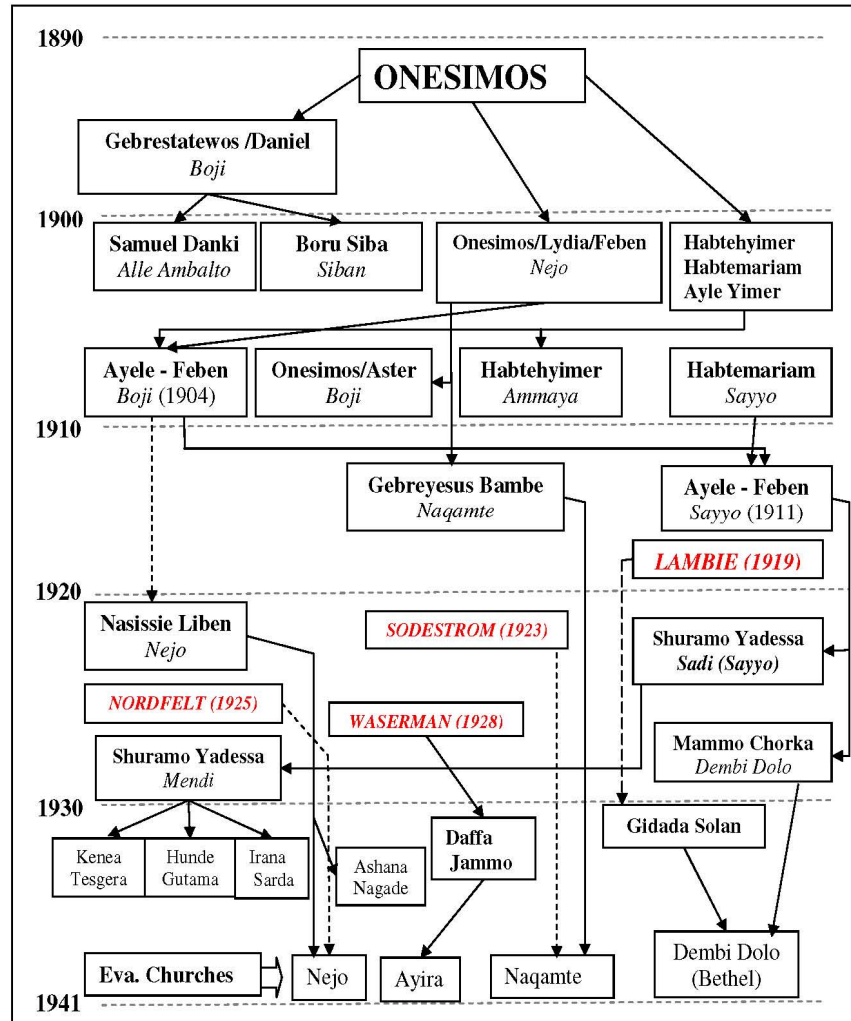
In the end, though, translation only makes the message accessible. The content of the message may be accepted or rejected. As Bartels had noted the Oromo showed a remarkable tendency to remain true to their own conception of God, *Waaqa*, even as they adopted a new religion. At the point of the encounter, in any case, conversion can only mean adhesion to

the new faith, despite the enthusiasm for the gospel in the vernacular. The warm reaction could be to the Oromo text itself rather than the gospel content. The next section deals with how the Oromo interpreted and responded to the content of the message.

INTERPRETATION AND MUTUAL VALIDATION

When European Protestant missionaries arrived in the Horn of Africa in the nineteenth century to reach the Oromo with the gospel, the Protestant and Macca Oromo religious traditions had a surprising number of key religious ideas that were similar. In this regard, I argue, following John Thornton's analysis of the encounter between Africans and European missionaries, that the Macca Oromo embraced Christian religious ideas and practices that they found compatible within the Oromo religion and resolved through mutual validation those they found to be different. Both the Oromo and the European missionaries had similar cosmologies in that both conceived the universe as being a two-tiered continuum: "this world," the material world which is accessible to anyone, and the "other world," which is invisible and accessible only to a few gifted individuals. The worlds are basically separate, but were intimately interconnected. The "other world" is primarily the abode of the divine, but also inhabited by deities, spirits and souls of the dead from "this world." It is also superior and controls events in "this world" (Bartels 1983: 46-47; de Salviac 2005: 155-156; Aguilar 2005: 57-60; Megerssa 2005: 76).

Even the creation myths each side believed about how the universe came into existence were more or less the same. Bartels (1983:355) states that for the Oromo creation begins with the element of water. According to the Borana version of Oromo creation myth, in the beginning, there was water. This primeval water, called Walaabuu or *Bishaan Ganamaa*, was divided into the *Bishaan Gubbaa* (Water of Above) and *Bishaan Goodaa* (Water of Below). This was a fundamental conception of the universe before it was shaped into the physical space comprising the celestial and terrestrial realms commonly known as heaven and earth, which the Oromo refer to as *qolloo* (lit. covering), and *dachii* (land) respectively (Megerssa 1993). Cosmologically, the conception is replicated in the realm of *Waaqa*, known as *Bayyanacha Waaqa* (The Repose of God) or *Fulaa Waaq* (The Dwelling of God), and the realm of humans, also known variously as *uuma* (creation), *adunya* (world), and *lafa* (earth). The fundamental difference between the two places is the absence of duality in the realm of *Waaqa*, which is also known as *Iddo Dhugaa* (The Place of Truth), and its presence in the realm of humans. The absence of duality, such as truth and falsehood or life and death, in *Waaqa*'s realm denotes wholeness or perfection, and their presence in the realm of humans denotes confusion, conflict, and suffering. The realm of *Waaqa* is therefore a place of delight to which the Oromo assign only noble intellectual happiness as contrasted with bodily

pleasures (Megerssa 1993; Conversation with Gemechu Megerssa, Adama, June 21, 2010).

The realm of *Waaqa* is a destination for the dead to enjoy the company and infinite blessings of the Creator. The Oromo describe death of a person as passing on to *Waaqa* (*Waaqati darbee*), or entering into *Waaqa* (*Waaqati galee*), or going to the place of truth (*iddo dhugaa dhaqee*) (Baxter & Kassam 2005: 15). The Macca are generally reticent about what part of the human body travels to the realm of *Waaqa*, deferring to religious scholars detailed knowledge about the afterlife (Knutssen 1967: 59-60). Yet they assert that truth never dies but goes to *iddo dhugaa*. According to Gemetchu Megersa (2010), the *Borana* Oromo believe that truth is the essence of *Waaqa* that animates humans in life. It might well be the indestructible part of humans that passes on to the other-world when they die. Because the Oromo consider death the inevitable outcome of the fact of birth (*namini gaafa dhalatee du'a*) and an experience no one is spared (*nutu dhaqaa malee isaan hin dhufaan*), they don't grieve excessively. Martial de Salviac learned about this conception of death at the end of the nineteenth century. He writes: "Who is dead, is dead, [the Oromo] cry out; he went into his house; he entered in Waaqa; we will have to follow this road …." de Salviac found that some Oromo, presumably from Harer, believe that, after death, depending on the deceased's work during his/her lifetime, the soul will be consigned to *ibidda ajabaa* (fire of punishment). But the Oromo generally place their trust on the goodness of *Waaqa* who they say loves them so much he would "not sacrifice them into the revengeful flame" (de Salviac 2005: 157).

In both European and Oromo conceptions, communication between these two worlds is made possible by revelations. In Oromo religion, individuals who had an extra sense with which to receive messages from the "other world" report back on the existence, nature, and structure of the "other world" (Aguilar 2005: 58-59). These individuals are known among the Oromo as *raaga* (prophet), *waa argoo* (seers), or *waa dhagawoo* (voice hearers). In addition to gifted individuals, the "other world" also communicated its message directly to the inhabitants of "this world" by orchestrating events, such as rain, to happen in "this world" in a way that everyone would understand that the message was intended to communicate something (Bartels 1983: 64). Various other mechanisms were used as a means of communication between "this world" and the "other world," including indirect revelations (augury, divination), direct revelations (dreams, visions and voices), and dramatic revelations (spirit mediation, human possession). The inhabitants of "this world" made their wishes known to the "other world" through prayers and rituals (Bartels 1983: 90; Megerssa 2005: 76-77). According to Aguilar (2005: 58), "Oromo rituals recreate, enact, and maintain the social order [which] symbolically expresses the cosmological order. Prayers link the earthly part of the cosmological order with the divine one."

In many ways, thus, the cosmology that the Protestant missionaries presented to the Oromo was similar to the indigenous Oromo conception of the cosmos. The two belief systems were not so terribly different that the practitioners on both sides could not comprehend the practices of one another. The information received through revelations was assembled into a comprehensive description of the universe, and the instructions, rewards and punishments received were compiled into *safuu*, a code of behavior and a religion (Megerssa 2005: 74-78). In the case of where the cosmologies appeared to be similar, thus, one would have to consider conversion as a matching of the two cosmological conceptions.

The two faith traditions also had important differences. One major area of difference is that the Oromo religion does not construct a religious dogma based on the revelations they had received. There were no established standards or canonized revelations in Oromo religion. In the view of Oromo, revelations come to them continuously, and updated the belief system. In fact, they believe that *Waaqa* appears to all men on a daily basis in nature and manifested himself in dreams, visions and augury (Zitelman 2005: 86-87). On this point, the Oromo religious beliefs differ from those introduced by the missionaries because the Oromo were not impressed by the notion of discontinuous revelation or a relationship with the divine who had ceased to speak, thus closing the "book of revelation." A story collected by Martial de Salviac in the late nineteenth century illustrates the difficulty the Oromo faced in accepting the notion of discontinuous revelation. He recorded a story narrated by an Oromo informant: "Waaqa in the beginning had given a book [to Oromo forefathers]. A cow devoured it. Waaqa was irritated and did not want to give us another book. We have been reduced to looking for the book where it was lost, inside the peritoneum of the cows that we consult to know the future" (de Salviac 2005: 158). In Oromo tradition, it is widely believed the practice of looking at a cow's stomach among the Oromo is said to have its origins in this folk story.

In cases of belief discordance, the Oromo and the missionaries resolved their difference through negotiations and validation of each others' revelations. The following exchange between one Catholic missionary and the Oromo listeners exemplifies a process that may have happened in many Oromo areas. The missionary thought that he had found in Oromo religion, in John Peel's words describing a similar situation among the Yoruba, "not only an open and dynamic system of belief and practice [but also] currents with which [his message] could swim and hope to turn [them] its own way" (Peel 2000: 122). The missionary presented the Bible to his potential converts and said:

> 'This book, which according to you, was given to your fathers by Waaqa and then was lost, I found it. Here it is!' And opening the catechism written in their own language, he read them the commandments of God. Amazed at hearing a volume read in

their own language, and delighted with the beautiful doctrine that it contained, the listeners expressed highly their astonishment. – 'But of course, they said, among themselves, he is right, that is well there the precepts of Waaqa taught by our forefathers…. (de Salviac 2005: 158).

The nature of the encounter with Protestant missionaries was more or less the same, as Dibaba's story demonstrates (cf. p. 146). Here the illustrative aspect of the story is not just the ingenuity of the missionary, but the response of the Oromo. What transpired is a negotiated construction of reality in which the missionary validation of the Oromo's belief and the Oromo's acceptance of the missionary's version in the context of their own religious tradition occurred.

The exchange between the missionary and the Oromo illustrates the two themes of this paper: first, hearing the new message in their own language from an Oromo evangelist caused the Oromo to become open to new religious ideas; and second, the Oromo accommodated the evangelical faith because its principles comported well with the religious ideas of their ancestors. The acceptance of the book nevertheless need not imply that the Oromo standardized their revelation but that they came to view evangelical Christianity as a new form of their old indigenous religion. This was the point of departure in Oromo conversion to evangelical Christianity where they began creatively to formulate a theology linking the indigenous and the universal faiths, so that, to use Okorocha's words describing a similar situation in Igbo conversion, "what is desired in the old is realized in the new, and . . . a dynamic equilibrium is maintained within a new and unified whole in spite of inevitable tensions" (Okorocha 1987: 31).

On their part, the missionaries decided not to contradict the local ideas of God. As they did particularly among other peoples that had a single name for that deity and whose creative and sustaining acts resembled the attributes of the Christian God, they adopted the Oromo *Waaqa* as a creator of human life and of the cosmos. This was more than a useful translating device. It meant that the God of the Ancestors of the Oromo came to be identified with God the Father of Jesus Christ.

JESUS THROUGH THE PRISM OF OROMO RELIGION

Thus far, I have maintained that in the process of conversion the Macca Oromo tended to reinterpret religious categories of the Protestant faith in their own cultural and religious frameworks. This position faces an immediate difficulty when it encounters the widely-held belief that the concept of Jesus as the only "son of God is nonexistent within indigenous religious conceptions" (Mbiti 1972: 51). Articulating the foreignness of Jesus in the African experience, Enyi Ben Udoh (1988: 92) says: "It is as though Africans are saying: God we know; ancestors we acknowledge; but who are you for us, Jesus Christ?" However, the notion that contextual

conceptions of Jesus are impossible in Africa without distorting the "authentic" meaning of the person of Jesus Christ, which remained a dominant view in African Christology, has recently been challenged. Several studies have shown that African Christians perceive Jesus not only in light of the Western missionary tradition but also in the context of their own cultural heritage and realities, perceiving Jesus as life-giver (especially healer), mediator (particularly as ancestor), loved one (family and friendship), and leader (king/chief and liberator). Matthew Schoffeleers (1994: 80) has surveyed various conceptions of Jesus as *nganga* (medicine man) in different parts of Africa and found that, in some regions, Jesus is known as *Eyen Zame* [He who sees God] for his capacity to be the intermediate between the supernatural world and humans (Stinton 2004; Bediako 2004; Donovan 2003; Schreiter 1991).

If Horton's claim that people have a tendency to comprehend new ideas in preexisting frameworks is valid, the issue at hand is whether there are indeed features in Oromo religious ideas that correspond to aspects of Jesus. The Oromo religion is commonly described as fiercely monotheistic, hence has no room for the person of Jesus. And indeed, as de Salviac has noted long ago, "the Oromo people do not tolerate one [who] expresses the slight doubt regarding the orthodoxy of their faith in the unity of God. They very highly protest, in such case, that there is and there will always be but only one God: *Waaqa tokotu*" (de Salviac 2005: 143).

Moreover, the Oromo traditionally referred to the creator God as *Waaqa Gurraacha*, literally Black God. In their context, when associated with *Waaqa*, blackness denotes divine mystery or inscrutability and hence the origin of the universe or the state of things before *uuma* (creation) was formed out of it. *Gurraacha* also means pure, denoting the implausibility of mixing *Waaqa* with anything else (Megerssa 1993: 15-16). The creator, who the Oromo believe set the primeval water of Walaabuu, which was already pregnant with the basic structure and components of creation, on the course that brought forth the totality of creation into existence, has no equal (Megerssa 1993: 97-98). As Gadaa Melba has noted, "*Waaqa* stands for a God who is the one and the same for all, the creator of everything, [and] the source of life" (Melbaa, 1999: 23). Even the names used by the Oromo to refer to the creator imply that *Waaqa* reigns supreme above everything else. He is known by such exalted names as *Fedha Bulo* (the Sovereign, accountable to no one), *Ulfin* (the Most High), *Abba Iffaa Dukkanaa* (Father of Light and Darkness)," *Abba-Dhugaa* (Father of Truth and Justice), and *Abba Nagaa* (Father of Peace), and *Fayissa* (Healer) (Zitelman 2005: 86; Megerssa 1993). All of these names testify, in addition to his power as the creator and sustainer of the universe, *Waaqa*'s sovereignty, omnipresence, omniscience, justness, mercifulness, and healing power (Melbaa 1999: 23; Sumner 1995: 33, 106, 313). Despite a diversity of appellation, the Oromo Supreme Being is, after all, *Waaqa Tokkicha* (the Only One), the source of life and creator of all things, who has no beginning and end (Rikitu 1998: 97).

The upshot of the foregoing discussions is that the indigenous Oromo religion is monotheistic. However, the theology of Oromo religion does not exclude the notion that *Waaqa* is manifested in multiple ways. According to Bartels (1983: 14), *Waaqa* is "both one, and, at the same time, also many." This assertion refers to *Waaqa*'s manifestations in various forms, such as *atetee*, *abdarii*, *boranticha* and *ayyaana*. At one level of reality, the Oromo understand *ayyaana* to be *Waaqa*'s creative capacity that made and shaped everything and is also contained in all creation, thus defining their character and quality. On another, as Lambert Bartels notes, *ayyaana* "may be personalized, feared, and, at times, invoked, but, in spite of this appearance of multiplicity, each one is also seen ultimately as a manifestation of one divinity" (Bartels 1983:14). According to Gemetchu Megerssa, *ayyaana* are of the same substance but not the same as *Waaqa,* and they act in the world independently of Him (Megerssa 2005: 73). In Oromo religion, the *ayyaana* are viewed as a kind of independent divinity and, at the same time, *Waaqa*'s link to creation (Megerssa 2005: 73). This is the same notion which de Salviac observed in the late nineteenth century among the Oromo. He writes that the Oromo "believe in *Waaqa toko*, unique universal creator and master. They see His manifestations in the great forces of nature, without mistaking them for him" (de Salviac 2005: 3).

On the whole, two generalizations can be made that underscore the capacity of Oromos to understand the divinity of Jesus within an existing framework. First, as *Waaqa*'s creative capacity, *ayyaana* existed before and after that which it caused to come into being. Second, because *Waaqa* created and sustains the universe through *ayyaana*, he appears to be of the world and external to it at the same time. Oromo cosmology unifies entities that are otherwise seen as opposites under a single function, hence the assertion that *Waaqa* is one and many at the same time. At the conceptual level, the complexity extant in indigenous Oromo conception of *Waaqa* in his relationship with *ayyaana* attests that the monotheism of the Oromo indigenous religion was of such a permeable variety that it has room for considering specific manifestations of that expression that are in keeping with the Christian idea of Jesus as a divine being.

In fact there are several religious ideas in Oromo indigenous religion that correspond to the very idea of Jesus as the son of God. The first is the notion that *Waaqa* acts in the world through *ayyaana*, which, among its many attributes, also means the principle or expression of cosmic truth. The Oromo say, *dhugaan ilmaa Waaqaati* (truth is the son of God), thus declaring that this "son" of *Waaqa* embodies the Divine Thought which created the *uuma* or everything. In other words, for the Oromo, *ayyaana* "is as much the creative act of thinking in which a thought becomes that it mentally represents" (Megerssa 2005:72). Ultimately, when *Waaqa* speaks or expresses his Divine Thought, the thought becomes the object originally conceived in the thought. We can postulate then that *ayyaana*, the Divine Thought that becomes reality when *Waaqa* speaks (*yayyaba*) it into

existence, is co-creator with *Waaqa*, just as Jesus was in the Christian doctrine of creation (cf. Genesis 1:26; John 1: 1).

This leads to the second idea that, when anthropomorphized, the Divine Thought takes on the notion of the first-born and is known among the Oromo as *Boranticha*, the "anointed one," who represents all that is perfect and personifies knowledge of social and cultural principles that govern human relations and all natural laws that govern and order the universe (Megerssa 2005: 76). As the principle that promotes social and cosmic harmony, the Divine Truth that the *Boranticha* personifies, the Oromo maintain, deserves to be worshiped/held in awe. In this sense, the religious concept that the Oromo notion of the *Boranticha* represents is not dissimilar to the Christian theology that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (cf. Exodus 4:22; Psalm 89:28; Colossians 1:15-21).

The third idea relates to the Oromo understanding of Divine Truth in the context of *Waaqa's* capacity for procreation. According to Gemechu Megerssa (2010), his *Borana* informants contend that *Waaqa* does not physically reproduce because he is not flesh to procreate (*Waaqnii hin dhalchuu, waan foonnii hin dhalu*) while acknowledging that he did "father" truth in the same way that humans produced culture (*Waaqnii dhugaa dhalee, namnii aada dhalee*). Conceptually, the Divine Truth is not of the same essence as *Waaqa*, though it proceeds from him, in the same way culture is a human-generated "reality" that can be experienced. Megeressa maintains that the Boorana Oromo explain truth as the link between *Waaqa* and humans using the metaphor of core and periphery or sage and fool. They say: "what the core has, the periphery embodies; what the sage has, the fool possesses" (*Waan qarrii qabu, qarqarrii qaba; Waan hayyuun qabu makkalii qaba*). This relates, in a very complex manner, to the Oromo conception of the *Boranticha* as the incarnation of *Waaqa's* truth in much the same way as Jesus, who is the truth (John 3:16), is God incarnate (John 1: 14).

Despite the contestation that the concept of Jesus is absent in indigenous religions, the notion of Jesus as co-creator of everything, the first-born among all creation, and the truth incarnate, are religious ideas that also permeate Oromo indigenous religion. And the notion of incarnation as the realization/manifestation of the divine is the religious idea at the heart of the Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

This paper has put forth a postulate that the Oromo conversion to evangelical Christianity was made possible by the way in which two central theological concepts or revelations interacted and ultimately validated each other. In the case of the Macca Oromo conversion to Protestant Christianity does not appear to have replaced the central tenets of Oromo cosmology with Christian beliefs about the origins and arrangement of the universe. The Macca Oromo converted because the newly-introduced Christian

concepts validated revelations in the Oromo tradition that dovetailed with the Christian tradition. Although further study will be required to confirm how widespread this experience was, existing accounts suggest that the Macca Oromo accepted the Protestant faith when missionaries recognized the Oromo revelations as valid. That means evangelical Christianity among the Oromo, at least during the first three decades after the encounter with missionaries, was a form of Christianity in which its followers accepted as genuine a series of revelations in the missionaries' variant of Christianity and the missionaries recognized the Oromos' religious traditions as divine expressions. And the Oromo accepted that the deity of old had been revealed in different ways to the missionaries and accorded status and worship to them.

All of these conversions that led to the religious exchange would not have been possible without the translation of scriptures into vernacular Oromo and the agency of Oromo Protestants who carried the evangelical message to their people. The interaction and exchange between Oromo religious beliefs and evangelical Christian beliefs are often represented as the conversion of the Oromo to Christianity. The paper has shown that this is an area for research that promises new insights into the many processes in religious experiences and practices that were set in motion by the encounter of the two religions in the nineteenth century and their interactions in the early twentieth century.

REFERENCES

Aguilar, Mario I. 1995. "African Conversion from a World Religion: Religious Diversification by the Waso Boorana in Kenya, Africa." *Africa* 65, no. 4, 525-544.

_____. 2005. "The "God of the Oromo": A Religious Paradigm in the Work of Lambert Bartels." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, no. 1-2, 52-67.

Arén, Gustav. 1978. *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.* Uppsala: EFS-forlget.

_____. 1981. "Onesimos Nesib: His Life and Career." *EECMY Information* 5, no. 81.

Bartels, Lambert. 1983. *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia, An Attempt to Understand* . Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag.

Bediako, Kwame. 2004. *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis.

Booth Jr., J. S. 1977. "An Approach to African Religion." In *African Religions: A Symposium*, by J. S. Booth Jr., 1-11. New York: NOK Publishers.

Braukämper, Ulrich. 1977. "Islamic Principalities in Southeast Ethiopia between the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries'." *Ethiopianist Notes* 1, no. 1, 17-55.

Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa.* Vol. I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Comaroff, Jean. 1985. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of South African People.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Crummey, Donald. 1972. *Priests & Politicians: Protestant & Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia (1830-1868).* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Donovan, Vincent J. 2003. *Christianity Rediscovered* Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis.

de Salviac, Martial. 2005. *An Ancient People Great African Nation: The Oromo.* Translated by Ayalew Kanno. East Lansing, MI: Self Published.

Digga, Terfassa. 1999. *A Short Biography of Onesimos Nesib, c. 1850-1931.* Addis Ababa: EECMY.

Eide, Øyvind M. 2000. *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia. The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church 1974-1985.* Oxford: James Currey.

Fisher, Hamphrey J. 1985. "The Juggernaut's Apologia: Conversion to Islam in Black Africa." *Africa* 55, no. 2, 153-173.

_____. 1973. "Conversion Reconsidered: Some Historical Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa." *Africa*, 27-40.

Gidada, Nagaso & Donald Crummey. 1972. "The Introduction and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity in Qelem Awraja, Western Wallaga, from about 1886 to 1941." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10, no. 1, 103-12.

Gurmessa, Fekadu. 2009. *Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia: Origins and Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* Edited by Ezekiel Gebissa. Translated by Ezekiel Gebissa. Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press.

Hamer, John. 2002. "The Religious Conversion Process among the Sidāma of North-East Africa." *Africa* 72, no. 4, 598-627.

Hassen, Mohammed. 1990. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horton, Robin. 1971. "African Conversion." *Africa* 41, no. 2, 85-108.

_____. 1975. "On the Rationality of Conversion (Part I)." *Africa* 45, no. 3, 219-35.

Horton, Robin and J. D. Y. Peel. 1976. "Conversion and Confusion: A Rejoinder on Christianity in Eastern Nigeria." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 10, no.3, 481-98.

Idowu, E. Bolaji. 1973. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition.* London: S.C.M. Press.

_____. 1967. "The Study of Religion: with special reference to African Religion." *Orita* 1, no. 1, 1-15.

Ifeka-Moller, Caronline. 1974. "White Power: Social Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 81, no. 1, 56-61.

———. 1987. "The Shattered Microcosm: A Critical Survey of Explanations of Conversion in Africa." In *Religion, Development, and African Identity*, by Kirsten Hoist Petersen, 11-27. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

Kaplan, Steven. 1984. *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia.* Stutgart : Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden.

———. 2004. "Themes and Methods in the Study of Conversion in Ethiopia: A Review Essay." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, no. 3, 373-392.

———. 1982. "Ezana's Conversion Reconsidered." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13, no. 2, 101-109.

Kassam, Aneesa and Paul T. W. Baxter. 2005. "Introduction: Performing the Soodduu Ritual ." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, no. 1-2, 1-20.

Knutsson, Karl Eric. 1967. *Authority and Change: A study of the Kallu institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia* (Göteborg: Etnografiska Museet.

Lundgren, Manfred. 1990. *Fotspåren Bortom Bergen [The Footprints Beyond the Mountains].* Stockholm: Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen, 1953.

Mbiti, J. S. 1990. *African Religions and Philosophy.* 2nd. London: Heinemann.

———. 1972. "Some African Concepts of Christology." In *Christ and the Younger Churches*, by C. F. Vicedom. London: Willas KMS.

———. 1980."The Encounter of Christian Faith and African Religion." *The Christian Century*, August 27- September 3, 817-820.

Megerssa, Gemetchu. 1993. "Knowledge, Identity and the Colonising Structure: The Case of the Oromo of East and Northeast Africa." *Ph.D. thesis.* School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

———. 2005. "The Oromo World View." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, no. 1-2, 68-79.

Melbaa, Gadaa. 1999. *Oromia: A Brief Introduction.* Minneapolis MN.: Kirk House Publishers.

Mudimbe, V. Y. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge .* Bloomington IN.: Indiana University Press.

Okoracha, Cyril. 1987. *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria.* Brookfield: Avebury.

Pankhurst, Richard. 1976. "The Beginning of Oromo Studies in Europe." *Africa* 31, no. 2, 171-206.

Peel, J. D. Y. 2000. *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba.* Bloomington IN.: Indiana University Press.

Rambo, Lewis R. 1993. *Understanding Religious Convesion.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rikitu, Mengesha. 1998. *Oromia Recollected.* London: Magic Press.

Rønne, Finn Aasebø. 1997. "Christianity in the Dynamics of South Ethiopian Societies and Cultures: Kambbaata-Hadiiyya." Edited by Katsuyoshi Fukui et al. *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies.* Kyoto: Shokado Book Sellers.

Sanneh, Lamin. 1989. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis.

_____. 2003. *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Schreiter, Robert J. 1991. *Faces of Jesus in Africa* Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis.

Schoffeleers, Matthew. 1994. "Christ in African Folk Theology: The Nganga Paradigm." In *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, eds. Thomas Dustin Blakely, W. E. A. van Beek, Dennis L. Thomson. Oxford: James Currey, 72-88.

Stinton, Diane B. 2004. *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* . Maryknoll NY.: Orbis.

Sumner, Claude. 1995. *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs: Collection and Analysis.* Vol. 1. Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

Tamrat, Taddesse. 1972. *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Thornton, John. 1998. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800.* 2nd Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trimingham J. Spencer. 1952. *Islam in Ethiopia.* Oxford: Geoffrey Cumberlege for the University Press.

Udoh, Enyi Ben. 1988. *Guest Christology: An Interpretive View of the Christological Problem in Africa.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Zitelmann, Thomas. 2005. "Oromo Religion, Ayyaana and the Possibility of Sufi Legacy." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, no. 1-2, 80-99.

SECTION V

PHILOSOPHY AND WOMEN

CHAPTER IX

SHOULD WOMEN LOVE WISDOM? EVALUATING THE ETHIOPIAN WISDOM TRADITION

GAIL M. PRESBEY

In the face of a world academic community that has been skeptical regarding the existence of a written philosophical tradition in Africa, Claude Sumner of Addis Ababa University had devoted over forty years to finding and studying *Ge'ez* philosophical texts in Ethiopia, as well as exploring a now written oral tradition of proverbs. Sumner's position on written texts is unique within the debate on African philosophy. Most of the focus of the debate has been on whether or not there is a written tradition of philosophy in Africa. Some suggest that some ancient Egyptian texts are indeed philosophy, and therefore count as the earliest written philosophy (Karenga, James). For those skeptical of the philosophic import of the Egyptian texts, the search is constrained to the last fifty years of professional philosophers writing in or about Africa, both its concepts and its existential situation.

Sumner adds a new dimension by championing a new collection of written texts from medieval and early modern Ethiopia. He explains that the texts are written in *Ge'ez*, and are sometimes free translations of earlier Arabic or Greek texts; however, Sumner has argued that their translation turns them into a unique Ethiopian contribution. For example, he argues that the Ethiopian translator, under the influence of the homegrown Ethiopian Orthodox Church, turned Skendes, the main character in *Life and Maxims of skendes*, into a Christian (*Skendes* 120). This Ethiopian Skendes is portrayed as deeply sensitive, thoughtful, and perceptive; in fact Sumner argues that the *Ge'ez version* is the most perfect, most morally exalted, and most chastened compared to the Greek and Arabic versions of the Skendes story (*Skendes* 131).

That there have been such texts takes on added importance in the context of a debate where philosophers, many of them African themselves (like Okolo 27-28; Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* 33), insist that the history of African philosophy can only be traced back to, at most, the last fifty years. The debate has for the most part, assumed that written texts are superior to wisdom passed orally; this is a contention that I have debated at length elsewhere ("Oral Philosophy"). However, Sumner has the strength of being able to point to medieval and early modern texts from Africa; thus even the most skeptical critic of oral philosophy must pause at his findings.

The story of Skendes, written around 1438-68 AD (*Skendes* 118), is just one of the five texts that Sumner has collected in *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*. He has also completed a five-volume series entitled *Ethiopian Philosophy* in which each volume is devoted to analyzing the texts. Sumner acknowledges that those who hold a narrow definition of philosophy as critical and introspective would only see one of his texts, *The Treatise of Zera Yacob* (a seventeenth century text), as philosophy. Yet Sumner believes that the neglected texts he has uncovered, as well as proverbs, form part of a sapiential or "broad philosophy" tradition dating back hundreds of years. Sapential philosophy is found in the form of sayings, maxims, exhortations, and proverbs *(Classical* 8). Sumner clearly advocates the value of this tradition. He also clarifies that these sapential texts possess a logic that might evade the casual reader. Calling it "figurative logic," and finding it in proverbs as well as his texts, he demonstrates how written texts based on the form of oral discourse (such as by Walda Heywat, who imagines objections to his views and replies to them) nevertheless put forward reasoned arguments in the logical form of ABA. Sumner also argues that some treatises, such as one by Zera Yacob, portray a "religious rationality," that while not secular as is Descartes' rationality, are nonetheless rational (*Zera Yacob* 26-46). Therefore, Sumner's attempt to broaden the definition of philosophy by increasing our notions of forms of logic holds a unique position in the larger debate. Elsewhere (see "Broad") I have discussed Sumner's innovations regarding the definition of philosophy with more detail.

Another key aspect of sapential philosophical literature is its focus on topic. The texts Sumner treats concern what he calls "the art of living" (*Source* 50); they focus on ethical issues, on knowledge that can be put to good use (*Wise* 100; *Classical* 8). Although they are not exhaustive of all philosophical topics, Sumner nevertheless insists on the importance of these ethical topics to philosophy. While acknowledging the impact the sapential tradition has had in Ethiopia, some of Sumner's African colleagues have had reservations about its value. Samuel Wolde-Yohannes, in particular, agrees that the sapential tradition has had a large impact upon Ethiopian culture, through the influence of the Christian church, which has been in Ethiopia at least since King Ezana confessed to the faith in 341 AD. However, Wolde-Yohannes expresses regret that a more critical Ethiopian philosophy, based on individual reflection on a wide range of philosophical topics, had not developed instead (319-21). Others, Sumner notes, see the wisdom tradition as contrary to the needs of modern, independent Africa; like Nkrumah and Fanon, they view Africa's uncritical traditional wisdom as part of the very weakness that left it an easy prey to colonization (Sumner, "Problem" 57-58).

Some contemporary African philosophers had, ten to twenty years ago, expressed their disappointment at those academics who seemed to glorify and enshrine African cultural ideas and practices, without subjecting them to rigorous and rational scrutiny, in the name of a kind of nationalistic

pride. Both Kwasi Wiredu and Paulin Hountondji wrote books in the seventies and eighties that pointed out irrational aspects of African practices and beliefs, suggesting that some old values were outdated and had to go. While many had popularly interpreted the authors as saying the past should be forgotten, these scholars have each taken pains to clarify that they think studying African traditional thought is worthwhile and important. As Wiredu cautions, however, studies of traditional African philosophy should not just be expository and clarifying, but also reconstructive, "evaluating our heritage in order to build up on it: (*Decolonization* 17). Hountondji explains, "The real issue is not whether African philosophy exists, but what use Africans today decide, in full lucidity and responsibility, to make of their traditions of thought … " (*Intellectual*" 88). So we can consider that a project like Sumner's, one of not just championing texts of the past as relics, but of analyzing texts and evaluating them, would be a worthy project within the field of African philosophy.

While Sumner excels in certain forms of analysis of texts, he has not focused on whether the wisdom put forward in the texts has a relationship to political and social power. Feminist criticism offers a source of hesitations about the "wisdom" traditions of Africa. Several of Sumner's texts are pious treatises that advocate a Christian life. Certainly the Ethiopian wisdom tradition, as is the case with so many other wisdom traditions, whether Egyptian, Biblical, or otherwise, provides excellent examples of virtuous conduct regarding, for example, compassion toward others, selfless hard work, truthfulness, humility, perseverance in the right, thrift, and generosity. One who lived by its maxims would in many ways live a virtuous life by most standards. However, it would be a mistake to accept a tradition because of its authority without subjecting it to scrutiny and evaluation.

We can easily understand the potential ambivalence of a contemporary Ethiopian woman toward the wisdom tradition when we consider her role in the institution that has fostered and transmitted it, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On the one hand, she is likely to be a frequent participant in the many long religious ceremonies of her Church. If living in a rural area, she may still seek advice from the male rural elders – advice steeped in this very wisdom tradition – regarding how she should live her life, including her sex life with her husband, complete with reference to proverbs and tradition; a recent Oromo play by Fayyisaa Yaadasaa entitled *Guulaa Bulaa* illustrates this point. On the other hand, she is not allowed, despite her piety, to play any leading role in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and, as we shall see, the traditional wisdom consulted by the elders regards her nature as weak or wicked. Accordingly, her place in society is rigidly delineated. Viewing her obvious attachment to her Church and its wisdom tradition, an outside critic is likely to speak of brainwashing or subtle manipulation by the dominant ideology. If she herself should become critical, she would be faced with the dilemma of Yentl of the Isaac Bashevis Singer novel (and the subtext of the Streisand film): can a woman love the wisdom embodied in

her religious tradition while refusing to accept the subservient role that same wisdom assigns her?

Sumner has defined wisdom as the sum-total of things worth knowing (*Classical* 8). In the case of the Ethiopian wisdom tradition, as with other traditions, I contend that some of what calls itself "wisdom" is not wisdom at all, but an unfair and inaccurate denigration of women. Descriptions put forward as neutral, factual accounts of women's nature and behavior are often sexist perspectives that flourish in a patriarchal society. Certain passages cannot stand up to rational scrutiny, whether Cartesian or figurative, since they are based on biased accounts written from a male point of view. It is therefore important when studying or promoting a wisdom tradition to encourage a critical attitude, and reject narrow-minded chauvinism when it shows itself in however "holy" a guise.

How has Sumner approached the rather problematic "wisdom" about women in Ethiopian sapential tradition? One of Sumner's Ge'ez translations, *The life and Maxims of Skendes,* is an ample source of "wisdom" about women. As a young student, Skendes was scandalized by the wise philosophers' saying that "all women are prostitutes." In disbelief, Skendes decides to test the truth of the maxim by trying it out on his mother. He conceals his identity and finds that, indeed, his own mother is willing to accept money to sleep with him for one night. While his mother had first vehemently refused the offer when her maid conveyed the message, she was later wooed by the maid's account of the handsomeness of her suitor. He spends the night with her, kissing her breasts, but going no further. Because of his experiment's success, he concludes that the philosophers' maxim is true (*Classical* 168-73).

However, the story goes on to convey both a tragedy and Skendes' later success in life. In the morning the mother questions her companion, asking with concern if he were not pleased with her. Skendes then explains, "I am your son." Upon the news, his mother runs out and hangs herself. Skendes, surprised at what has happened, blames his tongue and its utterance for the death of his mother, and so sentences himself to a life of silence. But his silence only intrigues others, and when the Emperor finds out that even under pain of death, Skendes will not say a word, Skendes is newly esteemed as a wise man, and the Emperor asks to receive counsel from him on all important matters. The rest of the book is the record of Skendes' wisdom on a myriad of topics, including his insights regarding women.

From a critical viewpoint, and certainly from a feminist viewpoint, Skendes' actions are morally problematic. Firstly, Skendes' attempt at empirical verification of the maxim falls prey to the fallacy of hasty conclusion. He very subjectively decides that a test on one person, his mother, is all that is needed; perhaps because he egoistically believes that his mother would be least susceptible to such temptation. He therefore concludes that if she were to succumb, all other women would as well. Why does he consider one example to be enough? It could be that Skendes

knows that men might be prone to negative valuations of women, but stop short from condemning all women, because of the esteem in which they hold their mothers. Showing that one's own mother is as weak or fallen as all other women makes judgments against women complete and universal. Skendes' experiment could also belie the assumption that all women act similarly, denying the independent agency of women.

Secondly, missing from the experiment is any sensitivity to the double standard to which men and women are often held regarding sexual issues. Is the maxim regarding "prostitutes," in the sense of those charging money for sexual services, limited to all women, because it is known that there are some men who will not accept money to have sex with a woman? To charge that "all women and all men are prostitutes" would not make sense, because men's moral worth in society is not routinely tested by whether they will resist offers of money to sleep with women. The economic background is missing as well. Women more often than men find themselves in financial straits, especially in male-dominated economies. This contextual factor would help explain why they would be more likely to accept pressure to have sex for money, and less likely to have the spare cash needed to encourage men to sleep with them for money.

Perhaps the moral distinction present in the contemporary West between a licentious woman and a prostitute (who has sex with men for money) is not made in the Ge'ez story. Sumner notes that the word *zamawyat* used in the maxim "all women are prostitutes" is used in the Ethiopian Bible to refer to all morally forbidden libidinous acts, including fornication and adultery (*Skendes* 233). Indeed in the story Skendes' mother seems to be more motivated by the handsomeness of her suitor, and is at first offended by the idea that she should accept money. Nevertheless she dose not refuse the money. It seems clear that Skendes' mother is not being condemned with all women for her love of "easy money" but rather for her uncontrolled lust for handsome men. However, even understood in the sense of lust, there is still a double standard. Do we think that men as a whole are easily able to refuse the sexual advances of beautiful women? If not, shall we say, "All men are prostitutes as well as women"?

While Skendes notes that all women have uncontrollable sexual desires, Sumner notes that Skendes nevertheless has pity on women, since they were given this desire by God as part of their nature, in order to ensure the continuance of reproduction (*Classical* 176, 189). Why then does Skendes not note that males are also given a libidinous nature by God in order to ensure their participation in reproduction? Sumner points out the influence of the earlier Greek and Arabic texts, which argue that since birth is such a painful experience, a woman would not otherwise return to her husband after she experienced the pain and anxiety of delivery, unless she were driven by inordinate desire (*Skendes* 94). It stands to reason that since men do not have to overcome such antipathy, a milder desire would suffice as impetus for their cooperation. The Ethiopian text of *Life and Maxims of Skendes*, perhaps influenced by its Arabic forbearer, puts the woman in the

role of sexual aggressor. She is lustful while Skendes remains relatively unmoved (*Classical* 172-73). Even the late Amharic version, which is less chaste than the earlier Ge'ez text, states regarding the meeting of mother and son that "she had carnal desire while he had spiritual love for her" (*Skendes* 122). And later, in his maxims, Skendes proclaims, "The lust of a woman (as compared) with that of a man is the ratio of ten to one" (*Classical* 216). However, the fact that God placed the desires in women is to Skendes no excuse for avoiding moral culpability; the "tragedy" of the story is that "his mother, as all women, is burdened with instincts that necessarily lead her to the incestual act; on the other hand, she is a free, responsible creature" (*Skendes* 266).

Fatimah Mernissi may here agree with Sumner's analysis of Arabic influence. She has put forward distinctions between Christian/Western and Islamic/Arabic versions of women's subjugation. According to her, Islamic societies do not see women as inherently weak or inferior (as in the West); rather they are potentially equal, and are feared because of their power to seduce men. Men fear "*fitna,*" a word used both to describe, on the one hand, disorder or chaos, as well as, on the other hand, a beautiful woman (with the connotations of *Femme fatale*). Moroccan folk culture and proverbs are filled with parallels between loving a woman and losing one's mind. Men are warned to stay away from married women, "who are considered to have more difficulties in bearing sexual frustration" (Mernissi 27-45).

We are, however, well-counseled to reject argument, whether attributed to God's agency or otherwise, that assert that women's sexual desires are greater than men's since it cannot be empirically shown. Such arguments are, as Mernssi insists, signs of men's fears of their own weakness and vulnerabilities. Although Skendes, on being asked to define man and woman, finds some shortcomings in men (such as weakness and instability), he depicts woman as a more conscious and active evil:

> Woman is the object of man's yearning; when she dines with him, she is a beast; when she rises from bed, a lioness; when she dresses up, a serpent; she is a disaster for all men; she is constantly intent upon destruction; she spreads war and evil; she is an insatiable animal, the object of man's yearning; she is like plundering beasts, worse than wild animals and snakes; she is evil, more malignant even than the lioness; her fruit is the poison of snakes and dragons; she excites deadly thoughts; she daily brings forth calamity; she is an imposed necessity; she generates evil (*Classical* 187).

Florence Hetzler, one of the few women philosophers to comment upon Sumner's work, takes issue with Skendes' definition of women. She points out that it is from women that the Emperor and Skendes and all men are born (Hetzler 33). Yet it is only too typical for men, and for wisdom

literature, to uphold women as mothers while denigrating women as wives and lovers. If such is the pattern, then Skendes' position is unique in that its denigration is complete, since not even one's mother is exempt from scorn.

Such descriptions of women, as Skendes' description above, encourage one to ponder, in what sense are such contributions "wisdom"? Sumner has defined wisdom as the inclination and steady purpose of putting knowledge to good use (*Classical* 8). In so far as Skendes puts to good use his "knowledge" that all women are prostitutes and shuns them, he conforms to this definition. To this day Skendes' message is a living tradition, and he is a role model for monks, in encouraging monks to keep their distance from dangerous women (*Skendes* 120). The emperor certainly admires Skendes for his contribution to knowledge (Sumner, Classical 176, 180, 197). What needs to be analyzed is the structure of domination which accepts such dubious "knowledge" and "puts it to good use."

But first, what comment does Sumner offer regarding the importance of the message of Skendes? He does not say that Skendes is right regarding his estimation of women's nature. He chooses to analyze the Skendes story as an example of Oedipus Complex. Skendes both loves and hates his mother; he wants to put her on a pedestal and debase her at the same time (Sumner *Skendes* 232). Of course, according to this analysis, Skendes himself is not consciously aware of his motivations. His true motives only become obvious to Sumner and others with the benefit of psychoanalytic theory. Sumner contends that Ethiopians should be proud that their heritage includes one of the few written versions of Oedipus story ("Volume" 1). But is this analysis satisfactory?

The Freudian analysis avoids the question of how Ethiopian society as a whole regards women. First, the emphasis on Freudian psychology turns Skendes into an individual with a complex neurosis: he is immature, infantile in so far as he has not passed through a stage that most boys grow out of (*Skendes* 227-28, 234). Skendes can therefore be written off as perverted, as the exception in Ethiopian society. In fact, that is how he is sometimes interpreted in popular Ethiopian culture by those who do not want Skendes' various virtues to become a challenge to their life style. As kinefe Rigb Zeleke found in his study, many prostitutes in contemporary Ethiopia have decorated their rooms with an embroidered saying that warns "Don't be like Skendes," meaning do not engage in unusual sexual positions (Sumner, *Skendes* 236).

The Skendes story differs from the Greek Oedipus tragedy. In the Greek Version, Oedipus is pitied because his life is ruined by what he has done; both Oedipus and his mother are destroyed. But Skendes is catapulted to fame and success by his experiment with his mother; his mother suffers a tragedy, while he escapes unscathed. He suffered from the memory of the death of his mother. However he curiously protected himself from realizing an accurate account of his role in her death, by blaming only one body part, his tongue, for having uttered the words "I am your son." In the early stages after the death, it is this act alone for which he felt guilt, and not the

scenario that preceded it, for he can observe an immediate connection between the two events. When Skendes finally communicates to the King the circumstances of his mother's death, he protects himself from any small part of blame in her death, through a reasoned argument contemplating necessity. He argues that the death was the outcome of a chain of coincidental events, thus severing any form of causality, and therefore blame, between his own words and actions to his mother and her resultant suicide. His parable of the "milk-bearer" is wholly inappropriate as a parallel to his own actions. While the milk-bearer of his story, in feeding guests milk which she does not know is accidentally poisoned, is engaging in an act of gracious hospitality that would be praised in most circumstances. Skendes is instead engaging in deception, incest, and payment for sexual favors – all morally unacceptable behaviors. The resulting suicide of his mother, while not foreseen by him, is triggered by his unacceptable actions as well as her shame at having cooperated with him in forbidden deeds (*Classical* 178-80). Surprisingly, the outcome of his experiment and his mother's expression of her shame does not lead Skendes to question the universality of the maxim which he confidently verified, and which he continues to believe after her death.

Skendes uses the milkmaid story to argue that not his mother *per se* but "the whole feminine world" is guilty of a crime (*Skendes* 302). Not only does Sumner's psychoanalytic study turn Skendes into a neurotic exception (thereby releasing Ethiopian cultural sexism from the need to change), but Sumner departs from Skendes' own view that the feminine world in general must share the blame, and ends up suggesting that the blame for the tragedy lies more particularly with the mother. Sumner notes that according to his interpretation of Freud, to consider all women as prostitutes is a sign of a severe form of fixation on one's mother. This "usually occurs" when mothers relate to their sons in a smothering and destroying way (*Skendes* 229). Such an argument would trace the mother's demise to the fruits of her own earlier smothering relationship with her son. But there is no evidence in the story regarding Skendes' mistreatment by his mother during childhood.

The Freudian analysis often goes directly against the reading of the text; supposedly such a reading is justified by the fact that characters do not reveal their true, inner, subconscious motives for action, but only their conscious motives which are expressions of denial. For example, Skendes is angered when he hears the philosophers say all women are prostitutes (a statement that would include his mother); the Freudian interpretation would have to say he is denying how happy he is to hear that his mother is available to himself (*Classical* 168; *Skendes* 231-32). Again, after Skendes has sent the maid with the message of the offer to his mother, he states that he will rejoice in his mother's virtue if she turns down the offer; and if she says yes, then he will be satisfied that the philosophers are indeed a sound source of wisdom. The Freudian analysis has to say that his true happiness would be if he were to be able to sleep with his mother – the one thing that

Skendes denies is a motive of his at all (*Skendes* 170). Such an analysis turns Skendes into a liar and self-deceiver, when the text presents him as an earnest young man in pursuit of knowledge.

Turning his attention from Skendes, Sumner finds the same emphasis on the evil woman in the earlier *Book of the Philosophers.* He notes that in that sixteenth-century book there is an avoidance of reductive dualism (which would equate women with evil), due perhaps to the fact that the text is a collection of the thoughts of various authors. Therefore, while the evils of the bad woman are elaborated in a way similar to Skendes, there is also mention of the good woman who brings into her house "the harmony, peace, and order we observe in a serene sunny sky" (Oromo 326). Feminists like Mernissi would be quick to point out that in the tradition found in the Middle East and Africa, women are rewarded with the moral title of "good" only when they conform to their social role of being deferential housekeepers. For Example, *The Book of the Philosophers* says, "Grace after grace is granted the woman who is reserved and good and patient, who holds her tongue (which, besides is) of no value." However, there are passages that counsel genuine care for one's wife: 'Consider your wife as one of the organs of your body. Man and wife are one body. Let a man respect his wife like an angel." This passage is followed by warnings against evil women and prostitutes (*Classical* 104, 108). In contrast to Skendes, who counsels men to avoid marriage to avoid sorrow (*Classical* 199), the seventeenth-century Ethiopian thinkers Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat encourage marriage as a way to happiness. They rebel against the Laws of Moses, which consider a woman unclean if she is menstruating. Yacob states that he treats his wife as an equal and not as a maidservant. With a touch of tenderness, Yacob describes this relationship:

> … [S]he was not beautiful, but she was good-natured, intelligent, and patient … Hirut, as soon as she became my wife, loved me greatly and was very happy. Formerly, she was looked down upon in the house of Habtu, and men in the house made her suffer. But since she loved me so, I took the decision in my heart to please her as much as I could, and I do not think that there is another marriage which is so full of love and blessed as ours (*Classical* 248).

Walde Heywat complements Yacob's views, and goes so far as to say that [m]arriage is the most beautiful and the greatest of all mysteries of nature; more than them all it helps mankind and its entire life; it manifests the creators wisdom and renders glory to him … "Draw near your wife marveling at and praising your creator …" Heywat extorts. Men should try to please their wives and make them happy (*Classical* 276, 278). Similarly Mernissi finds in the Islamic writings of Abu-Hamid al-Ghazali the belief that sexual pleasure is meant by Allah as a foretaste of heavenly bliss (29). However, this is not proof of women's equality. Heywat counsels men to marry women eight to ten years younger than themselves. Although his

reasoning that women reach "the nubile age" quicker and subsequently age faster, it may be that the slight biological differences in this area cannot justify such a wide age difference. More likely, social practices determine this age gap (Classical 277). It is Sumner's own appraisal that only Zera Yacob holds the position that men and women are equal.

We can, however, say that the reason these two authors praise women and marriage so much is that they were social critics of their times. In addition to rebelling against the religious sectarianism that was then prevalent, they also spoke out against the popular views and derogatory treatment regarding women, especially found in the monastic tradition. Samuel Wolde-Yohannes notes that while the sapential tradition has permeated Ethiopian culture, the critical evaluations of Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat found no popular following in Ethiopia (319-21). Perhaps these two authors posed a threat to the religious power-that-be. Sumner suggests as much in an interview with an enthusiastic Marxist, who was scanning Ethiopian history looking for positive role models for their new Marxist government. The reporter sees Zera Yacob as one who criticized the Church and the ruling class, who opposed the feudalist system, and denounced the exploitation of the people by the Church ("Yacob" 2).

Sumner finds negative views of women in his book, Oromo Wisdom Literature, Vol. 1: Proverbs. Sumner found sixteen Oromo proverbs on the topic of women, and almost all are wholly negative. It is said that a woman cannot manage the household, let alone public affairs: "only one proverb, out of the sixteen devoted to 'woman,' admits, as a concession to male 'superiority,' that it may be advantageous to have a woman in the house" (Oromo 327). This one positive reference is to the companionship that a wife can provide. However, the category of "woman" is not alone in being represented one-sidedly by proverbs. Sumner notes that while there are fifty Oromo proverbs for "vice," there are only eight for "virtue." Likewise, there is only one proverb on reality, while fifteen are on appearance; one proverb on moderation, while thirteen on excess, etc. Does this context ameliorate the seeming one-sided negativity of the proverbs on women? Sumner says of these one-sided cases, "That dose not mean that the idea of the contrary is unknown, but only that proverbs that would make up an axis of reference for the opposite notion either were not collected or were never formulated … the opposite, although being well known, did not become the subject of a proverb" (*Oromo* 292-93). The question is why not?

By examining closely related literature from a vastly different perspective, Yeshi H. Mariam raises further questions about the worth of wisdom. Her M.A. thesis analyzes the Amharic-language proverbs regarding women, thus complementing Sumner's collection of Oromo proverbs. Whereas Oromo speaking-people make up about 40% of Ethiopia's population, Amharic-speaking people make up about 30% of the population. But Mariam's, analysis much unlike Sumner's, is based on poststructural theory. Noting definitions by Firth, for example, who calls proverbs a "jewel of truth," and, an "outspoken piece of wisdom," she is

concerned that such expressions are seen to connote the idea of the objectivity of truth. Instead, she focuses on proverbs' role of telling others what to do. Mariam suggests that proverbs do not represent the view points of the entire society, but instead articulate the interests of the dominant group. Particularly, proverbs on women are based on the views of the dominant group in patriarchal societies. Proverbs reinforce the patriarchal system through indoctrinating the minds of the people and normalizing patriarchal views (Mariam, "Critical" 5-7). Discourse, including proverbs, is linked to techniques of control. Institutions wield their power through processes of definition and exclusion. They reach to the unconscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. This approach draws heavily on Foucault, who noted that while discourse's power relations may find their expressions at the institutional level, power at the localized level is nevertheless crucial. We could therefore say that proverbs' ability to influence men (and women) regarding their attitude toward women plays just as crucial a role in oppression as the institutional structures that suppress women. In fact, power relations are not always obvious; instead they are masked. They affect desire, so that one's oppression is not always obvious. Language and socio-cultural codes are slowly legitimized, until they are seen as "normal" ("Critical" 17-19).

For Foucault, truth and power are mutually produced. "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, *the types of disclosure which it accepts and makes functions as true* (qtd. in "Critical" 19). This clearly goes against the proverbs' own representations as expressions of self-evident truths. Mariam explains that poststructural theory shows that language does not just represent reality. It distorts reality through its implicit ideology. Meaning is constructed; "presenting itself as a transparent medium, language disguises its function as a meaning constituting system." There is no determinism in this view of language, for it is possible to "reconstruct those meanings that are not compatible with the structures in which we live." In other words, dominant discourse is not the only discourse ("Critical" 12-15). Since statements and beliefs are historically bound, they may change ("Critical" 16). Therefore negative proverbs regarding women are not inevitable, but can be challenged by a new social reality, made obsolete, or replaced by new ones.

Mariam raises the question, do proverbs reinforce the existing patriarchal system in Ethiopia? According to her observations, in contemporary Ethiopian society, women for the most part find their lives limited and constrained. Men's work consists of soldiering, plowing, and mercantile affairs, while women labor in all other categories, including agricultural work, reproduction and raising of children, and work in the home. Women are subjected to circumcision and early marriage. Across Ethiopia women are considered a source of contamination of men unless they perform cleansing rituals after childbirth, menstruation, and sexual intercourse ("Social" 59). Mariam suggests that in her society, "the

perception of women as weak in character justifies their control by the society at large" (Critical" 6).

It was the recent socialist government headed by Mengistu that dramatized the plight of women's "two-fold oppression" and insisted it would abolish inequality through the formation of women's groups. However, these groups were mostly ways of pooling extra labor from women, to make supplies to send soldiers during the war effort, etc. ("Social" 60-61). This would suggest that more than official institutional change is needed to challenge negative views of women. Although the official sloganeering of the government might change into a view that supports the freedom and equality of women, a change is needed on the micro-level, on the level of individuals' attitudes as they are shaped by language and other practices of culture. Mariam notes that even the recent proverbs on women that incorporate the gadgets of modern technology into their metaphors still contain the same outdated notions of women.

Women's reality has changed from the one depicted in many proverbs about women, and yet there are very few proverbs to depict this new reality. Divorce instigated by women is on the rise in the Amhara communities, and this is made possible partly by women's economic independence. Mariam insists that divorce does not carry a social stigma. There is one proverb written from a woman's point of view that suggests that if one's husband mistreats one, the best thing to do is to leave (divorce) him: "when a peasant gets sated he beats you with a ploughshare; leave him and come home, let him bake his k'ita" ("Critical" 51; appendix, proverb 257).

The role of women as mothers has always been ambiguous in proverbs. Although women were shut out of the public realm and consigned to home, there would at the same time be proverbs suggesting that women were incapable of managing the home, and were also poor disciplinarians of their children. In other words, they were not accorded competence in their own realm. Mariam notes a proverb of rebellion regarding the idea that women should not have to find their entire worth in the rearing of children: "Who has been buried in her children's hide?" ("Critical" 51); Appendix, proverb 258). Other contradictions lie in the fact that while women are belittled for being cowards, when a woman does act courageously she is often criticized ("Critical" 42-43, 77).

Sumner insists that proverbs are for the most part universal. Certainly Mineke Schipper's collection of African proverbs on women entitled *Source of All Evil* suggests that Ethiopia is not unique in its preponderance of negative proverbs about women. Mariam's interpretation of proverbs, which sees them as manifestations of dominant power structures and not as timeless verities, would encourage us to see proverbs as dynamic, capable of change as women redefined themselves and transformed the structures of society. And yet, she notes, women's discourse has lagged behind their experience. The present patriarchal discourse no longer describes women's experiences adequately ("Critical" 75-76, 79). Yet Schipper asserts that "Oral literature … can never be pinned down once for all on the basis of

form, content, or perspective. Depending on societal changes, stories are adjusted in various different directions" ("Emerging" 162).

A political analysis of proverbs and traditional African wisdom in general is not a new topic to Sumner. In fact, in an essay in which he summarizes various presentations made at a conference on African philosophy which he organized in 1976, he conveys the ideas of Niamkey Koffi and Toure Abdou of the Ivory Coast. Koffi and Abdou argued that philosophy itself springs from the will of a social group to dominate. Philosophies are apologetic, meant to make the rule of elders in the gerontocratic order look like sound thinking. Therefore, African traditional philosophies emphasize ethnic and brotherly solidarity, and the primacy of age as a source of wisdom. The values of loyalty, filial piety, obedience, and procreative fecundity are reinforced to give power to the gerontocratic order. Conflicts with parents are interpreted as being due to sorcery. In this way the political authority is regarded as a manifestation of heavenly will ("Seminar" 116-17). Although Koffi and Abdou focus on gerontocracy and not the sexism within gerontocracy, it could be added that what Koffi and Abdou say about Gerontocracy could also be said about "wisdom" regarding women. The broad wisdom tradition of Ethiopia emphasizes vices of women so that women will be seen as needing to subject themselves to men's rule. Since Sumner wrote the summary, he is obviously familiar with this approach himself.

If the tradition in Ethiopia up to the present time (with the notable exceptions of Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat) insists on women's inherent negative and dangerous traits, a scoffer could argue, why should anyone study such views? Indeed, exposing sexism in African culture is a project that has not always been looked upon with enthusiasm. Kristen Holst Peterson has explained that the goal of the wave of writing about Africa that began in the '60s was to "show both the outside world and African youth that the African past was orderly, dignified and complex and altogether a worthy heritage. " This kind of emphasis meant that women's place in society (centering on the home) was presented in such a way as to fight against cultural imperialism. For example, Lawino, the hero of Okot p'Bitek's poem, became such a symbol of resistance; she became a "holy cow." Peterson charges that "in refusing to admire Lawino's romanticized version of her obviously sexist society one tears away the carpet from under the feet of the fighter of cultural imperialism" (251-54).

Several African women have done specific studies of the forms that women's social oppression has taken within the wisdom myths and proverbs of their societies. For example, Kavesta Adagala of Kenya notes that patriarchal economic domination inherent in the gendered division of labor has its roots in the oral literature of the various ethnic groups making up Kenya. She explains that "the activities, role and participation of men in society and in the natural environment have been accorded higher status while women's activities, role and participation have been downgraded as expressive, spontaneous, unsystematic and intuitive" (53). For example,

men are awarded exclusive land rights because in many communities the legends surrounding the founding of the community regard men as those who first found and tamed the land on which the group settled. There are also stories in which women, when entrusted with jobs like tending cattle, acted irresponsibly, thus justifying the exclusive male ownership of cattle. Adagala therefore concludes that "more fundamental than the division of labor by sex, and thus management of natural resources by sex, there exists the division of the ownership of natural resources by sex" (55-57, 71).

In addition to the study of Adagala, Adefioye Oyesakin's study on Yoruba proverbs on women show that the wisdom tradition sees women as "agents of indiscipline" and the source of most moral problems in the society. Such studies suggest that if society is morally deteriorating, it must be due to the "weak links" of the moral order – the women. However, it is doubtful that the many problems facing Nigeria today – military rule, abuse of human rights, bribery, and corruption can be traced to the actions of women denounced in their proverbs.

Amba Oduyoye has done a study of Asante proverbs on women showing that the proverbs put forward the idea that all actions of note and merit are done by men. Her study is complemented by the findings of Safro Kwame, who says that Akan proverbs express the view that "all women are equally unfaithful, bad, or even worthless." This conception of women as greedy parasites, as put forward in the proverbs, "is inconsistent with most Akans' conceptions of their mothers who are obviously women" (261). Although Kwame insists on the universality of women's subjugation, he admits that such subjugation can take different forms, according to specific historical and social conditions (264). Therefore, one could still make meaningful distinctions, as Mernissi suggested, between Christian and Islamic forms of women's oppression. Different social conditions could also lead to different strategies for improving women's lives.

Florence Dolphyne of Ghana argues that the priorities of Western feminist movements and African women's movements are not the same. Whereas Westerners think African priorities should be the eradication of polygamy and female circumcision, Dolphyne thinks development in general, literacy skills, and economic well-being for women should be the highest priority; if these priorities are met, problems of polygamy and female circumcision will take care of themselves (Dolphyne). Likewise, Marie Pauline Eboh of Nigeria explains that black womanists, who are unlike white feminists, know that men are central to their lives, as husbands, brothers, and sons. African women are not apprehensive of wifehood and motherhood. "The success of African womanism derives from the discovered awareness by women of their indispensability to the male," Eboh explains. This assurance of indispensability then serves as an anchor for their liberating actions (211).

Leonard Harris describes studies in the implicit or commonly held values of societies as necessary steps before change can be contemplated. Philosophical anthropology's value lies in its driving presuppositional-state

understanding from cultural and linguistic reality. Social identity crises happen when presuppositional states are challenged. He insists that it is indeed of pragmatic value to study the "presuppositional states" of communities in order to understand what kind of future change is possible, and how one would best approach change in order for it to be understandable and acceptable for one's community. Therefore he does not see a necessary conflict of interests, but rather a complementarity between those who want to study the philosophies of African ethnic groups and those who want social change (190-91).

In addition to the question of how much we should want to accept or reject of the wisdom tradition, there is the question of how much moral condemnation to heap up on those who had upheld or still uphold the views of women's inferiority. After all, now after many decades of consciousness-raising by an active women's movement it is easier to spot the shortcomings and the blatant lies regarding some of the sayings on women. But should the author of the Skendes story be held accountable to today's standard? Should Sumner, writing his commentary in 1981 in Ethiopia, be found lacking for his ignoring of poststructuralist theory? Here, the time-factor plays a big role. Sandra Harding argues that the sex/gender system of domination has become visible "only now" (311). If this is true, it would become problematic to accuse authors of the past of neglecting it in their research.

Ethicist Jeffrey Stout makes some helpful distinctions regarding moral rightness or wrongness, and the justification for holding a moral position. One may be justified even if wrong, he states, because whether one is justified in one's views depends upon one's epistemic circumstance. Especially when one goes back in time, one cannot expect historical thinkers to have as sophisticated an argument regarding a moral position as we do now with the benefit of hindsight and years of experience (Stout, *Ethics*). So while his actions may have been morally wrong, it may be possible for Skendes to escape "epistemic blame" for the way he treated his experimental subject, his mother, for it is only recently that we have come to know the various psychological damages that can beset a subject – especially one who has not first consented to the experiment.

Seyla Benhabib, in a "Methodological Preamble," states that it is unfair to engage in what she calls "self-righteous dogmatism of the latecomers," who "juxtapose the misunderstand-ings of the past to the truths of the present." She complains of this undertaking. "[I]f we approach tradition and thinkers of the past only to 'debunk' them, then there really is no point in seeking to understand them at all" (6). In light of this criticism, the approaches of Sumner and Mariam seem complementary. Sumner does not dismiss the worth of the classical Ethiopian texts and oral traditions, because of their harsh views on women. As Sumner explains, the texts raise significant questions. Johannes Paulus Bachman describes the text on Skendes as full of enlightening insights, and excellently composed (cited in Sumner, *Skendes 81, 221).* Luigi Nusco considers the texts gathered by

Sumner to be instructive and "morally healthy, because many rules of practical life and moral behavior … are still valid" and are "spiritual food for our young generation" (260). However, not all aspects of the messages are equally healthy. The analysis that Mariam provides also is needed, for such an analysis is missing in Sumner's accounts. Perhaps what is needed in the future is a study of what aspects of the wisdom tradition women find particularly fulfilling in their own lives. Which proverbs do they turn to, for what kind of guidance?

The work of Claude Sumner and of Yeshi Habte Mariam separately play an important role in understanding Ethiopia's past and present, in order to shape its future. They are the present-day Zera Yacobs, analyzing the accepted verities of their times to see if they stand up to the scrutiny of reason. They can learn from each other, and we can learn from both of them. Their studies will be of benefit to the Ethiopia of the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Adagala, Kavesta. 1992. "Mother Nature, Patriarchal Cosmology and Gender." *God, Humanity and Mother Nature.* (ed.), G. E. M. Ogutu. Nairobi: New Era/Masaki. 47-55.

Benhabib, Seyla. 1995. "The Pariah and Her Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Biography of Rahel Varnhagen." *Political Theory* 23.1, 5-24.

Dolphyne, Florence Abena. 1995. "Polygamy and the Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective." *Readings in African Philosophy: An Akan Collection*. (ed.), Safro Kwame. New York: UP of America, 1995. 235-50.

Eboh, Marie Pauline. 1992. "The Woman Question: African and Western Perspectives." *Postkoloniales Philosophieren: Afrika*. (ed.), Herta Nagl-Docekal and Franz M. Wimmer. Wien: R. Oldenbourg, 206-13.

Harding, Sandra. 1983. "Why the Sex/Gender System Become Visible Only Now?" *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science*. Boston: D. Reidel, 311-42.

Harris, Leonard. 1980. "Romanticism and Scientism in Africa." *Presence Africaine* 113, 175-92.

Hountondji, Paulin. 1983. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

_____. 1996. "Intellectual Responsibility: Implications for Thought and Action Today." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 70.2, 77- 92.

Hetzler, Florence. 1991. "Ethiopian Cultural Heritage: Art and Philosophy." *Books for Life*. (eds.), Negussay Ayele and Claude Sumner. Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 29-43.

James, David. 1995. "'The Instruction of any' and Moral Philosophy." African Philosophy: *Selected Readings*. (ed.), Albert Mosley. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 147-55.

Karenga, Maulana. 1990. *The Book of Coming Forth by Day: the Ethics of Declarations of Innocence*. Los Angles: U of Sankore P.

Kwame, Safro. 1995. "Feminism and African Philosophy." *Readings in African Philosophy: An Akan Collection*. (ed.), Safro, Kwame. New York: UP of America, 253-65.

Mariam, Yeshi Habte. 1995. "A Critical Analysis of Amharic Proverbs on Women." MA Thesis. Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands.

_____. "Ethiopian Women in the Period of Social Transformation." *Economic and Political Weekly* 29.44 (29 Oct. 1994): 57-62).

Mernissi, Fatimah. 1987. *Beyond the Veil: Male Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Rev. ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

Nusco, Luigi. 1976. "To What Extent is it Possible to Speak of an Ethiopian Philosophy?" Abba Salama 7, 258-61.

Okolo, Chukwudum. 1990. *Problems of African Philosophy and One Other Essay*. Enugu: Cecta.

Oduyoye, Amba. 1979. "The Asnate Woman: Socialization through Proverbs." *African Notes* 8.1, 5-11.

Oyesakin, Adefioye. 1985. "Women as Agents of Indiscipline in Yoruba Traditional Poetry." *Nigeria Magazine* 53.3, 38-43.

Peterson, Kristen Holst. 1995. "First things First: Problems of Feminist Approach to African Literature." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft et al. New York: Routledge, 251-54.

Presbey, Gail. 2002. "'Broad and 'Strict' Distinctions proposed by Claude Sumner Regarding Ethiopian and African Philosophy." *Perspectives in African Philosophy: An Anthology on the "Problematics of an African Philosophy: Twenty years After 1976-1996*. (eds.), C. Sumner and Samuel Wolde Yohannes. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Printing P. 76-88.

_____. 1996. "Ways in Which Oral Philosophy is Superior to Written Philosophy: A Look at Odera Oruka's Rural Sages." *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* Fall, 6-10.

Schipper, Mineke. 1996. "Emerging from the Shadows: Changing Patterns in Gender matters." *Research in African Literatures* 27.1, 155-71.

_____. 1991. *Source of All Evil: African Proverbs and Sayings on Women*. Nairobi: Phoenix.

Stout, Jeffrey. 1998. *Ethics after Babel*. New York: Beacon.

Sumner, Claude. 1994. *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing P. 1985. Los angles: Adey.

_____. 1974. *Ethiopian Philosophy Vol. I: The Book of the Wise Philosophers*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing P.

_____. 1981. *Ethiopian Philosophy Vol. IV: The Life and Maxims of Skendes.* Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing P.

_____. 1978. *Ethiopian Philosophy Vo. III: The Treatise of Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat.* Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing P.

_____. 1995. *Oromo Wisdom Literature, Vol. I: Proverbs, Collection and Analysis*. Addis Ababa: Gudian Tumsa Foundation.

_____. 1991. "Problems of an African Philosophy." *Books for Life*. (eds). Negussay Ayele and Claude Sumner. Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 44-71.

_____. 1978. "Seminar on African Philosophy, Addis Ababa University. 1-3 December 1976." Abba Salama 9, 104-52.

_____. 1986. *The Source of African Philosophy: The Ethiopian Philosophy of Man.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.

"Volume IV on Ethiopian Philosophy Comes out. "*Ethiopian Herald* 37.1 (4 June 1981): 1, 5.

 Wiredu, Kwasi. 1995. *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Wolde-Yohannes, Samuel. 1994-95. "Western Philosophical Tradition and Ethiopian Sapential Tradition." *Ethiopian Review of Cultures: Religious Studies in Ethiopia and Eritrea, a Symposium*. (Special Issue), 317-26.

Yadassa, Fayyisaa. 1996. *Guulaa Bulaa.* Oromo Play performed in Addis Ababa. 24 March.

"Zera Yacob's Philosophy of Protest." *Ethiopian Herald*. 21 Nov. 1976: 2, 5.

SECTION VI

SAGE PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER X

THE CONCEPT OF PEACE IN THE OROMO *GADAA* SYSTEM: ITS MECHANISMS AND MORAL DIMENSION

TENNA DEWO

Although peace has been a leading and universal theme in religion, morality, and social life, it is one of the most abused concepts in politics. War and violence continue to be unleashed under the pretext of "peace." The bulk of humanity claims to prefer peace to war, tranquility to violence, friendship to enmity, and consensus to compulsion. Yet human beings wantonly threaten peace and use it to cover up evil in both human thoughts and works. The topic of "peace" is the urgent issue of our time. The consensus among moral philosophers regarding the staying power of peace is that human beings have not discharged their moral responsibility in solving the problems that threaten peace.

In aptly asserting that the "talk of peace and prosperity is not pious cliché but the statement of urgent necessity," Grayling (2005: 258) has launched a discussion that opens the door to introducing the Oromo concept of peace to an audience already interested in the relevance of traditional beliefs for twenty first century philosophical debate. In his recent book *The Heart of Things,* he invites readers to reflect on ideas pertinent both to personal questions about happiness and the quality of life to wider public concerns, such as war and democracy. In this essay, we present Oromo concepts to an audience for whom they are new, while at the same time introducing Oromo readers to the philosophical debate over how to regard and assess traditional belief systems.

The Oromo of Ethiopia maintain that "peace," translated as *nagaa*, is the essential key to all cosmic and human order, possessing the highest and most central value for humanity to pursue. This view is expressed in the songs they sing, in the prayers and blessings they offer, in the ritual and ceremonial activities they undertake, in the speeches and narrations they deliver, in the administrative and legal actions they perform and in the proverbs, folktales and stories they cite or tell. The Oromo concept and practice of peace is based on traditional values and beliefs anchored in the *Gadaa*, the politico-military and ritual system of the Oromo. This paper then explores both the Oromo concept of 'peace' and the mechanisms used to sustain it within the context of an ongoing philosophical discourse on morality amidst social and political change.

For the Oromo peace is not a given; instead it is achieved through persistent efforts. Their faith and commitment to facilitate the existence of conditions that are suitable for peace to flourish inspire intellectual inquiry.

Particularly at this moment in time when millions are longing for peace, but when the modern mechanisms of keeping peace do not seem to meet the needs of the people, it is imperative to explore the roots that peace has in the traditional values of indigenous societies. In this light, this paper explores what peace means for the Oromo both at the individual and societal levels, what goal it has for them, what moral values underlie it, and the mechanisms by which the Oromo make, restore, keep and promote peace. The last section of the article ventures into a critical assessment of the applicability of Oromo conception of peace and its mechanisms of peacemaking to twenty-first century situations.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Royce Anderson, as noted in his article "A Definition of Peace," peace is a condition of having a well-lived life (Anderson 2004: 103). Since not all who seek and need it attain a well-lived life, clearly peace is a value-laden concept denoting a desirable way in which people live together harmoniously. Louis P. Pojman, for example, states, "We want to live a meaningful, fulfilled life as individuals, and we want to live together in a prosperous, flourishing Community" (Pojman 2005: xi). A. C. Grayling adds, "Almost everyone wants to live a life that is satisfying and fulfilling, in which there is achievement and pleasure, and which has the respect of people whose respect is worth having" (Grayling ibid). The nagging question that deserves answer for these influential philosophers is "how should we live our lives?"

Since all humans aspire to have a well-lived life, peace is the common need for all. As Grayling again observes, "it is impossible to be truly happy when people around you are not; for our natural sympathies make the happiness of others a part of our own" (ibid.). It is conceivable that one can be happy while others are suffering from war and violence, terror and fear, poverty and hunger of different scales. However, peace in the true sense of the word may not be maintained in a society "where wealth and opportunity are unfairly distributed" (ibid.: 248).

In such a context, one denies to others the peace that he/she wants for him/herself. Grayling tersely asks, "which would you prefer: Machine-gun fire in the next street, fear, danger – or warmth in winter, holidays in summer, a good job, hope, enjoyment? If the answer is obvious, why should the peace and prosperity alternative be yours alone" (ibid.: 258)?

The implication of Grayling's question is clear. No rational human being should expect an island of peace and serenity in a sea of want and deprivation. Even though no one has preferred war and violence to peace, war and violence have been the tragic realities of human existence. Why has humanity that needs peace more than anything else lacked the power to put an end to events that violate peace? Responding to Grayling's invitation to provide a philosophical foundation of how humans can pursue a well-

lived life, this article maintains that the Oromo traditional concept of peace can provide practical solutions to the perennial problems that disturb peace.

Philosophers are not unanimous concerning the application of tradition, regarded as "that body of practice and belief which is socially transmitted from the past" into a context of modernity, which is defined as the rational and scientific views, beliefs, knowledge and life of the present (Craig 1998: 445). Traditionalists seem to advise humanity to embrace the past without any critical concern and are thus accused of being "so engrossed with the past that they have little care for the present and the future" (Tripathi 2003: 15). They contend that tradition or the past has the authority to guide the present, because it contains "the rules of conduct for personal and social life, the duties and responsibilities of person in different walks and stages of life" (ibid: 16). In contrast, the very idea of tradition is an anathema to the anti-traditionalists. They dismiss the authority of the past or tradition in favor of the present. According to Karl Popper, a prevalent modern attitude to the past holds that "I am not interested in tradition, I want to judge everything on its own merit … quite independently of any tradition … with my own brain, not with the brains other people lived long ago" (Craig ibid.).

The "either this or that" option does not present realistic choices. The traditionalists' position is unsound, because tradition might have been stuffed with bias and prejudice, irrational and non-rational beliefs, superstitious and mythical imagination. The uncritical, wholesale adoption of tradition can hamper development and threaten the well-being of life. Tripathi comments, "in spite of its stabilizing role in social life, unquestioned acceptance of customary morality has had many negative effects on the growth of human life and human personality" (ibid.: 116). If we recognize tradition as it is, we may not only lose sight of both its merits and demerits but also consideration of the realities of the present.

On the other hand, the uncritical acceptance of the anti-traditionalists' position may deprive us of the vital qualities entailed in tradition. This is particularly harmful to societies such as Ethiopia in which traditional values and systems are not a dead fact, but lived experience that is sacred and always meaningful. In fact, tradition is a life that the majority in traditional societies still live and the rigid demarcation between the tradition of the past and the life of the present is only imaginary. The past is in the present, in its good or bad, relevant or irrelevant, form. As Grayling noted, "seeing into the past is a necessity for seeing the present and the future more clearly" (Grayling 2005: 33).

Therefore, traditional beliefs and values should not be accepted or rejected as a whole. Instead, they should be critically examined in order to disentangle the pertinent and good from the obsolete and bad contents in the best philosophical tradition of examining "the validity of every belief to see which is good and which is spurious" (ibid: 248) with a goal of "liberating, freeing us from prejudice, self-deceptive notions and half truths" (Pojman 2000: 2). The purpose is not to prescribe the past as the remedy for present

predicaments, but to present a balanced and critical assessment of Oromo traditional concepts and practices of peace and suggest their possible application in conflict resolution today. The ideas are presented as responses to the longstanding philosophical question, "what good do traditional beliefs have for human development at the present".[1] As such, the article has the dual purpose stated above: to present Oromo traditional concepts of peace while at the same time addressing the philosophical debate over how to regard and assess traditional belief systems.

DEFINITION AND MEANING OF PEACE

Nearly all Western languages define peace as the absence of war, violence or strife. In non-Western languages, the definition of peace emphasizes spiritual or inner tranquility. In addition, there are those who define peace as a harmonious relation between different parts of entities, systems or orders (Anderson 2004: 102). The Oromo term *nagaa* literally means peace, but a definition that encompasses everything that it implies has yet to be given. Observations of Oromo ritual and ceremonial activities suggest that peace is the harmony of things or parties involved in certain relations – it is the harmonious relation between the different parts of the human and cosmic orders.

In many cultures, peace is commonly understood in terms of human well-being, particularly in politics. Among the Oromo, the concept of peace goes beyond the human domain. In his book *Oromo Democracy,* Asmarom Legesse writes, "Peace is a pervasive and sustained concern in moral life. The long blessings that are given daily by Oromo elders are prayers for peace. The theme of peace is everywhere" (Legesse 2000: 77). Thus the Oromo believe that everything must be at peace for societal well-being. This can be gleaned from the following Oromo prayer, very often offered in Western Shawa.

> O, Waaqa (God) give us peace
> Peace to the land and sky
> Peace to humans
> Peace to uumama (nature)

---

[1] A. C. Grayling writes that philosophers, "sought and offered answers to such questions as: what is truly valuable? How should one live? What is the nature of the good? How should we understand love, death, grief, hope, freedom, truth, justice, beauty … and how should we live according to that understanding? What must we do to live courageously and successfully? How should we treat others? What are duties as an individual, a citizen, a member of human community? What are the rights we humans have? How might we best respect the world we live in? These questions overlap; and answers to them jointly define the life truly worth living. (Grayling op. cit.: 264).

Peace to animals
Peace to the wild beasts
O, God listen to us, we pray to you
Make us live in peace, we know that you can do it
O, God you are the only Father we have
Protect us from evil, protect everything from evil
We do not want to do evil to anyone, protect us from
those who intend to do it to us
Save us from the spears, swords, and fires of war
We do not want to set fire to anyone, help us keeping
away from those who want to set it to us
Help us in our effort to do away with evil
O, God, peace matters most to us, keep away from us all
those anti-peace forces
O, Father, give us your light that leads us to sustainable peace
(Author's interview with elders in West Shawa 2005.)

That the Oromo pray for the peace of everything, even for such things as stone, water, and air, shows that in Oromo cosmology everything is interconnected through a myriad of webs and threads. Human beings are related not only to fellow humans but also to nature, and even to the spiritual power believed to be supernatural. Lambert Bartels writes the remark of his assistant, Gemetchu Megerssa, who says, when Oromo pray for peace, "there are not two but three parties. The third party is *Waaqa* with whom peace is made, too, and through whom people make peace with each other" (Bartels 1983: 252). But in the light of the above prayer, the parties are not only three but more.

If any one of the parties is not in peace, according to the Oromo, it is unlikely that the other parties can enjoy it. Humans cannot enjoy peace while nature suffers turmoil. The Oromo strongly believe that making peace with nature is as essential as being at peace with oneself and with other human beings. Being at peace with God is an incomparable experience, and one can be at peace with God only if he/she is in peace with everything else in nature. Thus for the Oromo peace is holistic, it is the harmonious relationship among all the parties involved.

Prayers for peace are made not only in groups but also separately or individually. They ought to be made particularly in the morning and evening, before meals, and during special occasions such as holidays, weddings and mediations. In the morning, for example, the Oromo pray; "O, *Waaqa*, God you made us spend the night in peace; make us also spend the day in peace" (ibid 291). In the evening, shortly before going to bed, they say, "O, *Waaqa* God you made us spend this day in peace. Give us a lasting peace" (Megerssa 1994). When a meal is served, they pray, O, God here is food; make us have it in peace. Bless it for us, so that it satiates us. We thank you for your boundless generosity" (author's interview in West Shawa 2005).

In "*Being and Becoming Oromo,*" Gufu Oba, citing Baxter, writes, "The maintenance of the proper and correct ritual vocabulary, particularly in prayers and blessings, was a prominent feature of the "Peace." (cited in Oba 1996: 119). Oromos value, respect and make peace because they believe that it positively gives values to human life. It is a condition in which human life, individually or collectively, is free from tension, fear, terror or violence in general. Very often Oromo seniors are heard saying, "We respect peace because all humans need it, and God loves it. All humans need it because it is the opposite of violence that threatens the good life" (Author's interview with Oromo elders in *Borana* and West Shawa 2005). Put very comprehensively by Jan Hultin, peace for the Oromo "is a moral state that is a necessary condition for fertility and life, and for the well-being of people and society. Where there is no peace there is misery and death" (1994: 78). Thus for the Oromo peace is understood as one of the necessities of life. In the absence of peace, even the fulfillment of all other basic necessities cannot be adequate for the preservation and development of human life.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PEACE

The Oromo seem to ascribe both intrinsic and extrinsic values to peace. It is extrinsic since people pursue it as a means for the survival and the flourishing of their lives. It becomes intrinsic when people view it as the highest or most valued condition to achieve, not just as a means to an end. Nonetheless, there is no rigid demarcation between the two, since peace can simultaneously be extrinsic and intrinsic. When, for example, elders resolve conflicts, they say that they endeavor not for the sake of individuals involved, but for peace. Viewed as such peace is intrinsic. However, when they say that they make peace to relieve the disputants of tensions and hostilities, the good of these individuals is valued as an end. This makes peace extrinsic. Moreover, the peace that humans may pursue for its own sake probably generates a desirable value for the pursuer. In general, however, the value of peace, for the Oromo, is superior to any individual or collective achievement.

In many societies, peace is commonly promoted, valued and advocated primarily in contradistinction to violence or conflict. Where and when evil is absent or mitigated, it is believed that peace reigns; but when evil is prevalent peace is absent or undermined. In Oromo traditional belief, "peace is much more than a mere absence of strife" (ibid.: 78). It is understood and explained not merely in terms of the explicit presence or absence of physical confrontation, but in relation to implicit, internal, and psychological experiences or states of life.[2] Internal, implicit and systematic

---

[2] This conception of peace comports well with Royce Anderson's survey of various definitions of peace. He writes, "Whereas most Western definitions

strife, violent acts and behaviors, arrogant and aggressive attitudes, unfair and abusive treatments, are all threats to peace.

In traditional Oromo worldviews, therefore, any human action or behavior that is harmful to the flourishing of human life is contrary to peace. One may lose peace and experience evil because of one's own deeds, because of the actions of others or due to conditions beyond one's capacity to control. Personal peace is threatened when someone does to another individual, to society, to God or even to self, something that he/she knows is proscribed by custom or even personal conviction. This is self-inflicted evil. Poor living conditions, as the Oromo believe, sap the basis of individual peace. This is evident in *Borana* elders' rhetorical question, "What does peace really mean, for a person who is forced to go to bed with an empty belly because of poverty"? (Author's interview with Jaatanii Diida in *Borana* 2005.) In this sense, a person or a community that suffers perpetually from injustice because of lack of good governance cannot have peace. This is another caused evil.

From this follows the notion that the Oromo perceive peace to have internal and external dimensions. Internal peace is the expression of the harmonious relations of the different units of the community. It includes personal peace, which is a state of an individual experience in which a person does not have physical, mental, social, spiritual or legal troubles or is not in conflict with himself. Such states are achieved as a person obeys his/her inner feelings that are governed by his/her moral principles. In the belief of the Oromo, a person who is at peace with him/herself is likely to live in peace with others. If a person is not at peace with him/herself, then he/she is likely to do evil to them – individuals, society and *Waaqa.* Thus the Oromo always strive for the peace of one and of all. If every member of a given community has peaceful life within himself, then the community very likely will enjoy peace.

This belief is, fostered by *Gadaa* values that teach the Oromo not to be violent towards one another, but instead cultivate a sense of caring, sharing and valuing one another. *"*The *Gadaa* system and the institution of *Qaalluu"* writes Lambert Bartels, "essentially form a ritual system stressing the basic principles of internal peace and cooperation" (Bartels cited in M. Basisi 1994: 25) among the Oromo. *Gadaa* Officials, *Qaalluu* ritual leaders, and Oromo elders teach that the Oromo people should not "break the peace among them. Aggression should be directed against [non-Oromo] outsiders, (Hultin ibid.: 78) not against one's community. In prayers and

---

of peace tend to emphasize the absence of violence, Eastern definitions tend to be positive in the sense that peace means the presence of certain characteristics rather than the absence of negative characteristics. A truly global understanding of peace should include both the absence of factors such as violence and the presence of factors such as balance, harmony and unbrokenness (Anderson ibid.: 102)

blessings elders are very often heard saying, "O, God, make our peace everlasting. Bless our harmony which is our source of strength and beauty. Do not divide us. Make us stand and remain together – when we stand together being shoulder to shoulder anti-peace forces get frustrated and those who love peace get encouraged (author's interview with Dagaagaa Cuucee, West Shawa: 2005).

In the traditional context, thus, individual Oromos are expected to behave and act towards one another and towards others according to a commitment to the value of peace. The *Borana* Oromo in particular give special emphasis to the maintenance and promotion of internal harmony or peace among the members of their own community. They maintain that peace is the supreme value for which every person should persistently strive (Bulcha 1996: 51). Witnessing this Johan Helland says, "The maintenance of internal peace is a strongly expressed ideal in *Borana* public life" (Helland 1994: 140). The same point is underscored by another scholar, Mekuria Bulcha, who cites Baxter in this regard, "Between *Boran* there should be peace and gentleness, … violence even angry violence between *Boran* is a sin" (Bulcha op. cit.: 51). That means, "In everyday personal interaction, *Borana* men are expected to treat each other's physical and psychological integrity by not using violence … or insults to each other" (Dahl 1996: 175). In these manners, the *Borana* Oromo endeavor to reduce the possibility of a conflict of serious nature.

While internal peace emphasizes personal peace and peace within the Oromo community, external peace refers to the peaceful or healthy relation that the Oromo have, make or establish with other, non-Oromo, communities. In the relationship that they establish with non-Oromo ethnic groups, the Oromo prefer friendship, cooperation and tolerance to enmity, mutual exclusion and intolerance. Many scholars and researchers of sociology, anthropology, history, religion, politics, etc. with the exception of some Abyssinian writers assert that the Oromo do not act with arrogance and violence, aggression and confrontation. The principle of tolerance and peaceful coexistence is inherent in their culture and values (Bassi 1965: 65).

Intensive interviews conducted by the author in 2005 with Oromo elders in various parts of Oromia reveal that the Oromo notions of peace and tolerance emanate from their conceptualization of human differences and oneness. The following is the author's summary: Difference is regarded as a matter of fact, and hence it should be recognized, valued, or respected. Even though human beings have differences, according to Oromo traditional belief, they all have sprung from a single source. The Oromo maintain that all humans are the children of the same father *Waaqa* or God. As descendents of the same God, all people are distant siblings, even though spatio-temporal differences have made them appear strangers to one another. The Oromo traditional perception of human difference, in essence, is the same as the difference between identical twins, that is, the difference within the same human family. Because this kind of difference is one of diversity within unity, the fact that difference exists is not a source of

conflict. Both unity and diversity become bases for conflict when humans abuse them (author's interview with Caalaa Sori 2005). Oromo elders observe that ideally, therefore, there has to be a reasonable balance sought between human differences and their unity. There is a possibility of exaggerating one and underestimating the other when the human mind is infested with bias and prejudice, ignorance and arrogance, greed and lust. In the Oromo *Gadaa* system human differences (whether social or natural, mental or physical, shape or color, wealth or knowledge, etc.) are not characterized by the difference of superiors and inferiors, but rather by those between social equals and friends. Oromos treat non-Oromo persons not only as equals but also as brothers and sisters.[3] If people treat one another as brothers and sisters, peace will prevail. "We Oromo" as many of them very often say,

> do not want to ill-treat others, because we do not want also to be unfairly treated by others. It is our duty to fairly treat others if we need others to treat us fairly. Why ill-treatment if we recognize what they want us to recognize for them, and if they recognize what we want them to recognize for us? Ill-treatment does not exist in the language of our *Gadaa*. We want everything to remain in peace. (author's interview with Caala Sori ibid.).

An apparent reason for treating non-Oromo fairly is the expectation of reciprocal treatment by others. The more concrete reason is the moral obligation sanctioned by religion. In view of their indigenous religion, treating a brother or sister (who is considered a child of *Waaqa)* unfairly is an offence against God. In Oromo traditional belief, being human alone is reason enough for treating another human being morally. Throughout their history, the Oromo have welcomed and assimilated people who settled among them. As observed by some researchers the Oromo have developed the culture in which every right and privilege an Oromo enjoyed is granted to outsiders who dwell among the Oromo. Oromo law forbids a distinction between biological and social descent when adoption takes place.[4]

---

[3] Through a ritual known as *horomsuu,* literally making someone Oromo, outsiders are incorporated into Oromo society. In Gemetchu Megerssa's words, "in the Oromo sense of this word [*horomsuu*], non-Oromos, even those captured in battle, can be socially transformed and acquire an absolute equality of rights and privileges with those who are Oromo by 'biological' descent (Megerssa 1994: 24).

[4] According to Gemetchu Megerssa, "Traditional Oromo law strictly forbids and severely punishes any one who attempts to make a distinction between social and biological descent (Megerssa 1994 24, 256-260).

* OROMO* PEACEKEEPING MECHANISM

The Oromo consider that peace is an invaluable condition achieved and maintained at a very high cost. Despite their unswerving commitment to peace, the Oromo have been at war for centuries, fighting external aggressors and colonizers. As one *Borana* informant summarized, "the Oromo never made or make war or violence our choice (Caala sori ibid.). However, peace cannot be maintained by good will and naïve wishes. As one Oromo elder retorted, "You cannot enjoy peace simply because you love and want it. How can you enjoy it as long as there are others who willfully set fire to your house? We Oromo go fighting only if we do not have any other means to protect our peace. Just as we know how to make peace, fortunately we also know how to do war" (interview with Dagaagaa Cuucee ibid.). The wars that the Oromo waged were defensive in posture and were fought to ensure survival in the face of aggression and diminishing resources, and to defend peace itself. In other words, peacemakers are also fighters for peace who are expected to struggle on all possible fronts to win the battle against anti-peace forces. It is always indispensable for peace forces to confront those who harbor ill-will against peace.

The readiness to fight wars in defense of peace does not belie the Oromo belief that peace is sustainable if it is obtained by peaceful means. As such, talks and dialogue are the more effective tools for maintaining an enduring peace. Oromo elders almost inevitably stress that any peace obtained by force is perpetually haunted by force (ibid.)

Because of this belief, as evinced in Oromo oral and written history, the Oromo pursue preventive remedial strategies to avoid acts of conflict or violence. Through the first strategy, they attempt to avoid or reduce actions, behaviors, relations, situations and factors that undermine the condition of peace; and through the second, they attempt to restore the peace to the situation before it was disturbed by some kind of violence. The first aims at attacking the causes of conflict or violence, the second to heal the injurious effects of violence.

In the preventive strategy, the Oromo use two mechanisms for the prevalence of peace. These are socio-political and ideological/spiritual mechanisms. Both are embedded in the *Gadaa* system. The first refers to the political and legal aspects of the *Gadaa* system, and the second is the guiding principle of the system. It aims at cultivating and inculcating a desirable attitude in people.

Gadaa *as a System of Peace*

Asmarom Legesse defines *Gadaa* as "a system of generation classes that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities" (Legesse 2000: 104). As such, *Gadaa* is a very complex system. Its essential content and prime

objective is the maintenance of peace and order. Paul Baxter, another authority on the *Gadaa*, states that the *Gadaa* system "is a cognitive system [which] epitomizes what social relations should be, not what they are. In that sense *Gadaa* is a political philosophy and a theology (quoted in Bartels 1994: 2). I perceive the *Gadaa* to be not only a political philosophy and a theology but also a moral philosophy since it attempts to rationally explain the moral quality that human acts and behaviors should have in the intricate nature of human relationships.

The features of the *Gadaa* system serve as premises and conditions for the maintenance and promotion of peace. The *Gadaa* system is organized according to age-sets that consist of men who belong to the same genealogical generation (ibid). Age-sets are formed by grouping the sons of the *Gadaa* class of their fathers into a generation set. If a son is born to a father who is a member of the ruling *Gadaa* class, those between the ages of 40 and 48, then he passes through various functionally differentiated stages and responsibilities until he becomes a member of the ruling *Gadaa* class 40 years after his father's *Gadaa* class took office. In this arrangement, *Gadaa* generation sets assume different positions, roles and responsibilities every eight years associated with different grades (ibid: 20). The same individual assumes different social positions and performs particular duties associated with the various grades. An individual who has been experiencing these different stages or grades of personal development and social norms becomes a member of the *Gadaa* ruling class at around the age of 40, and stays in office for eight years.

Five *Gadaa* classes take power from each other within a period of forty years. Each of these groups has its assigned responsibilities, but each comes to power at the age of forty. The term of office of one *Gadaa* class is eight years. When ruling *Gadaa* class leaves office, the next class succeeds it, and the process goes on for another forty years. That means each *Gadaa* generation comes to power once every forty years. When that cycle is completed, a new cycle begins. The ruling class of the new cycle consists of the sons of the members of the generation that goes into old age (*Jaarsaa*), completing the eighty generational cycle (Legesse 1973).

Even though the five *Gadaa* classes are in some ways comparable to modern political parties competing for power, the *Gadaa* political system is devoid of the vices of the fierce and sometimes violent competition that characterize modern politics. It is necessary that one of the five *Gadaa* classes rules within a forty year period. The transfer of power does not involve political campaigns of modern elections that are characterized by introducing serious allegations, and even confrontations that often lead to bloodshed and death. In the *Gadaa* system, the classes hold power in rotation and transition from one to another class occurs at a scheduled time. The outgoing *Gadaa* classes clearly know which *Gadaa* class is the legitimate one to take the next term of office. Because the term of office is defined and responsibilities of each class fixed, the transfer of power in the *Gadaa* system always takes place peacefully. The outgoing class retires

with praise and blessings, and the new group takes over with blessings and good wishes. No confusion, curse or blame are involved, nor is violence employed in the process of the transfer of power. Using any means for seizing power other than peaceful means does not exist in the nature of the *Gadaa*. Even an exchange of unhealthy language is forbidden legally, religiously and morally (ibid: 219-220).

In the Oromo *Gadaa* system, as Lambert Bartels observed quite sometime ago, "power emanates from the people, and if those to whom it is entrusted fail in their responsibility, it can be withdrawn. This is the Oromo version of 'government by the people'" (Legesse 2000: 126). If power belongs to the people and if these people have the right to bring down those who abuse their responsibilities, then the society enjoys good governance, which is a necessary condition for peace to flourish. Though the power of relieving officials of their duties is a crucial safeguard against the abuse of power, such a practice may not even be necessary since officials' terms are limited. In the traditional Oromo system of government, the entrenchment of power is virtually impossible since the class that has been in office for eight years does not intend to stay in power beyond its term (ibid: 114-116).

The Rule of Law as Guarantor of Peace

Gadaa is a law-making system, creating laws that clearly define what ought to be done, and what ought not to be done. Marco Bassi says the Oromo have "traditional norms and laws recognized by everybody as binding" (Bassi 1965:65). Every member of the community, according to the *Gadaa* notion of law, is expected to know what her/his rights are to exercise and what her /his duties are to perform. Laws, in the context of the *Gadaa* system, are made not with the intention of restricting the freedom of people, but, as Legesse observed, "to meet some of the great challenges that confronted them in history" (ibid: 259). The maintenance of peace is one such challenge. For the Oromo the law is the strongest tool for the maintenance and promotion of peaceful life.

Laws are made in the general interest and with the consent of the society. Once every eight years the assembly of *Gumii Gaayyoo* of the *Borana*, *Mee'bookku* of *Guji* and the *Caffee* of *Macca* and *Tuulamaa* Oromo are convened. These assemblies are higher political bodies that stand above all other institutions (Legesse 2000: 33). All the members of the *Gadaa* class as representatives of the society actively participate in these institutions. According to Legesse's observation, the assembly "sits as a law making body, revises existing laws, and proclaims new laws" (ibid). They are the laws that according to Gufu Oba "provided the requisite social and political order which enabled them to move in and live with each other in peace" (Oba 1996:118).

For the Oromo the rule of law is the decisive parameter of peace. They believe that when laws rule all men, the possibility for the prevalence of peace is high, but when men rule, peace loses ground. The major source of

conflict, according to the perception of many Oromo, is the violation of the laws and norms of the society. This is very frequent when men rule. Peace is maintained when laws rule men, and laws can get this power when men respect them as binding for all. The love and respect Oromo have for peace has made them a law-abiding community. With regard to this point Legesse says that Oromo "are one of the most orderly and legalistic societies in Black Africa and many of their laws are consciously crafted rules, not customarily evolved habits (Legesse 2000: 29).

In the Oromo society under the *Gadaa* system, both the governing and the governed are law-abiding. There is no one who could be an exception (standing above the law) to the law. Legesse states, "Oromo idea of rule of law is reflected in the notion that those who govern the people must also be judged by the same laws they are empowered to enforce (ibid: 200). He illustrates this point by quoting an *Abbaa Gadaa* by the name of Galma Liban, who clearly states that even the *Abbaa Gadaa* himself is subject to the rule of law (Ibid). Not only the rulers but also the ruled are aware of this and the abuse of power is subject to checks and balances. If *Gadaa* officials exercise power in a way that deviates from the spirit of the law, their action will be characterized as *seera cabssa*, an act of breaking the law. Such behavior forces a *Gadaa* official to stand before and be tried by the same law he defies.

One interesting point is that *Gadaa* officials are not authorized to use force to enforce the law. They do not have a police force, a prison system and any coercive mechanism to govern the society. Commenting on this, Marco Bassi has written, "[the] *Boran* do not dispense any executive force, nor can any one including the political leadership impose anything on others by the use of force or violence (Bassi 1994: 16).The law is not backed by force; rather the latter is kept away by the peaceful implementation of the former.

Civility and Egalitarian Ethos of Gadaa Officials

Gadaa officials are expected to be always at peace with each other. Lambert Bartels quotes an Oromo elder who states of the officials, "I have never heard of any quarrels among themselves" (Bartels 1994: 4). *Gadaa* officials are in power to enforce the mission of *Gadaa*, which is to make people live in peace and harmony. Officials with this duty should not be at odds with each other. Rather, as leaders, they must set good examples for their people whom they lead.

In addition to the structural safeguards against abuses of power, the institutions of the *Gadaa* system promote egalitarian ethos that discourage competition for supremacy and power. On the basis of his study of the *Borana*, Bassi asserts that the Oromo "have successfully developed an egalitarian but efficient political system in the pastoral context, with the *Gadaa* system promoting social integration" (Bassi 1996: 159). This is true of most Oromo communities in their traditional context. Donald N. Levine

also states, "Where the Amhara system is hierarchical, the Oromo is egalitarian. Where the Amhara is individualistic, the Oromo is solidaristic" (Levine 1974: 128). In their social relationships, the Oromo emphasize equality rather than inequality, and hence treat one another as equals. Among the *Macca* Oromo, when community leaders meet to discuss important issues, they are guided by notion of *qixxee,* a term denoting equality (Lewis 2000:173).

Indeed the Oromo recognize difference but consider it as less significant compared to equality. There are persons who are given high esteem because of the importance of their social roles and positions, yet this does not entail a sense of superiority and unfair treatment. This egalitarian style of life obviates the need for severe repression, thereby providing for a condition necessary for the maintenance of peace. When oppression and unfair treatment become dominant among the members of a given community because of inequality in access to resources or treatment before the law, conditions are ripe for conflict. Egalitarian values, however, encourage peace and at the same time discourage violence.

Spiritual and Ideological Teaching about Peace

Peace can be maintained not only by administrative activities and legal procedures but also by raising the awareness of people about its importance. Through blessing, prayer, ritual gathering, ceremonial undertaking and meetings, assemblies, work places, and occasional performances, the Oromo reinforce values that promote peace. According to Mario Aguilar, "Prayers and blessings are important part of the daily life of every Oromo. In those prayers, the most important word is peace. In every moment of prayer, peace is asked for the community" (Aguilar 1996: 190).

At these and other occasions, one gets the impression that everything that the political and ritual leaders of the *Gadaa* system say and do is for the sake of peace. Not only teaching the good, but also denouncing evil is part of peace maintenance. Behaviors such as jealousy, stealing, telling lies, speaking evil to others, failure to keep promises and using bad or obscene languages are condemned because they are believed to be threats to peace. This instills in the mind of the people strong faith and an unswerving commitment to peace. Bassi makes the point that "the values expressed in *Gadaa* rituals condition the behavior and attitudes of individuals; and therefore, they also have an indirect, but not marginal, political effect" (Bassi 1994: 24).

Most of the Oromo *Gadaa* assemblies, meetings or gatherings are convened under the shade of big trees. Besides the teachings, prayers and blessings, information is exchanged about anything that threatens peace, and discussions are conducted to avoid the threats. In the Oromo belief, every member of the society is responsible for the maintenance of peace and security, since such could be achieved only if everyone acts and behaves in favor of it. It is mainly through prayers and blessings that

everyone is made to know this responsibility, and be committed to it (Levine 2007: 51).

Peace and Poverty

According to the Oromo, poverty is seen as a great evil, anathema to peace, since it harbors conflict or violence and provides a ground for it. "A person with an empty belly," according to Oromo elders, "does not only know what peace really means, but also does not have the power to discharge his/her social responsibility" (author's interview with Doyyoo Wuqaa and Jaatanii Diidaa in *Borana* 2005). As Gufu Oba articulates, the *Borana* Oromo in particular believe that "[a] man without cattle cannot perform his social obligation, marry or participate in rituals. In effect he loses his identity as *Borana* (Oba 1996: 120).

Therefore, there is an assumption that the problem of poverty should be tackled, since deprivation and want are known seriously to threaten peace. In *Borana*, for example, when a son is born to a family, he is given cattle, camel, sheep or goats. The child grows with wealth of his own. When he comes of age, he is already a self-sufficient person, according to the standard of the community, prepared to perform his social duties. On the other hand, if somebody is unable to support himself/herself, then it is the moral duty of the clan to rehabilitate him/her. The rationale for rehabilitation is that, by meeting the needs of its less fortunate members, the community makes them somehow live on equal basis with others. According to this ideal, no one is forced to go out begging, to become a dependent person or to live in a condition that is contrary to a healthy and peaceful life.

Conflict Resolution

The Oromo have a long-standing indigenous mechanism to resolve conflicts and restore peace. Even today, many people in Oromo society do not like resorting to state courts or any government office for resolving conflicts. They prefer the traditional conflict settlement mechanism called *jaarssummaa.* The word *jaarssummaa* has double meanings – literally, it means being or becoming elderly (senior citizen) and figuratively, the mechanism of conflict avoidance undertaken mostly by seniors in the community. It is a council of elders that mediates between conflicting parties or sometimes issues a ruling when restitution is required for damages.

In the Oromo tradition, whenever conflict occurs, it must be brought under control quickly. Otherwise, animosity keeps on festering by drawing into the conflict more parties than those who are directly engaged in the conflict. Moreover, it may develop into revenge, another serious threat to peace, which the Oromo regard as an endless evil. For the Oromo, revenge, which means attacking violence by violence, serves no good purpose. In

situations infested with a climate of revenge, the well-being of all parties involved is constantly haunted by all sorts of evil, the end of which is not in sight. Because the *Gadaa* system does not permit any revenge to take place, the common knowledge among the Oromo is that war, force or violence does not solve conflicts. Non-peaceful means may create temporary calm but not a lasting peace. In Marco Bassi's words, "Revenge, internal war, and reciprocal fear do not have an institutional place in *Boran* political organization (Bassi 1994: 27).

Even in conflicts that cause minor or major injuries, damages or loss, including death, the Oromo prefer restoration and peace through peaceful means. *Lubbuu balleessuu,* literally destroying life or soul, in the Oromo belief, is the most serious crime any human being can commit. According to the ethics of *Gadaa*, if a person is killed, neither the relatives (clan) nor any other person is allowed to take an independent action. Rather they ought to bring the case to the attention of *Gadaa* officials or to the elders of the community – who are believed to have the power and experience to fairly and peacefully handle such serious cases. Marco Bassi writes, "When a dispute arises it is taken to [the] assembly where people are confronted with the established norm (Bassi 1996:155). *Gadaa* officials deal with causes involving conflicts over the loss of human life in one of two major ways. One way is sentencing the perpetrator to death, and the other is making the wrongdoer pay compensation for the loss of life. Capital punishment was given to a person who had committed not only a heinous crime, but also someone who is believed to be potentially dangerous to the peace of the society (de Silviac 2007: 136-37). Gufu Oba quotes an Oromo elder saying, "serious and persistent disturbers of the peace could be put to death by beating on the open palm of the hand and in the groin, *haamaa mudaanmmudii* with a club, *bokku*" (Oba 1996: 119).

Indeed, according to Oromo traditional morality, the death penalty itself is not a cherished recourse, since it is an act that dismisses a person's inalienable right to life. Yet it is the price that should be paid for maintaining peace and security. In Oromo belief, putting a criminal to death for the peace of the society is eminently preferable to permitting him to stay alive and perpetually threaten the peace of many. Averting the greater evil by committing the lesser one is justified essentially on utilitarian grounds. When they comment on such dilemmas the Oromo say, "*Waaqa*, God, knows why this is done, and hence it does not offend him" (author's interview with Dewo Abetu in West Shawa, 2005)

Upon the submission of the required amount of money for compensation (or number of cattle), elaborate and complicated negotiations, ritual, and ceremonial activities are performed through the mediators. When this is over, the relation between the two parties is believed to go back to the peaceful state that existed before the conflict, which means peace is restored (Bartels 238-254).This process makes peace not only between the parties but also with W*aaqa,* God. An Oromo eyewitness to such a ritual told Lambert Bartels that "peace making is always concluded with prayers

and rituals of reconciliation with *Waaqa*, God" (Bartels 1994:2). The Oromo believe that whenever people enter into conflict with one another they also enter into conflict with God. Lambert Bartels reports the Oromo saying, "*Waaqa* does not hear our prayers if we are not at peace with each other" (ibid: 9). God is said to be happy when humans (and all of his creatures for that matter) are at peace; God hates conflict.

Critical Assessment

In the forgoing section, I have tried to explain the Oromo conception of peace as a harmonious relationship between the different orders of the human and cosmic systems and mechanisms by which conditions that promote peace are sustained. In the following section, I present a critical evaluation of the moral dimension of these concepts and associated social mechanisms. The purpose is to explain the possibility of restoring the Oromo traditional views of ethics in ways that are applicable to the life style of the present generation.

Peace as the Antithesis of Violence

In Oromo traditional belief, peace and violence are expressions of attitudes that individuals or people hold towards life, rights, dignity, interests, and freedom and consequently the way they treat one another in these relations. Peace demands fair treatment and as such it is what morality requires, and unfair treatment is violence and hence immoral. Morality at a basic level, according to Grayling, dictates how people treat each other (ibid.: 18). The Oromo believe that it is their moral imperative to treat all people, regardless of human differences, with respect and honesty.

Peace prevails when people behave in accordance with the society's moral values and social norms. That means the life and work of virtuous individuals in society is a necessary precondition for peace. According to the Oromo, a virtuous person is one who behaves and acts in accordance with *safuu,* which is, as Gemetchu Megerssa succinctly put it, "the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded … [a moral category] which directs one on the right path … [and] shows the way in which life can be best lived" Megerssa 1994: 17). When individuals separately or as a group act in violation of *safuu,* their behavior is described as *hamtu,* vicious, and regarded as the life and work of the wicked. Peace is virtuous because it is beneficial to life, and violence is vicious because it is harmful to life. That is why the Oromo believe that violence is contrary to peace and anathema to morality.

Peace as a Product of Virtuous Life

The value the Oromo ascribe to and the respect they have for peace is rooted in their perception of what it means to be human. To be human is to

achieve a well-lived life, which, according to the Oromo worldview, is the basis of peace. Indeed its well-being as intrinsic, rising above one's own interest, controlling one's own emotions, being far-sighted, having sympathy and compassion, care and concern, forgiveness and tolerance, and respect for others. At the heart of all these qualities is humanness. Ironic as it is, a well-lived life, a virtuous life in the Oromo sense of it, requires moral courage because being moral does not directly and immediately benefit the individual moral agent. This view of the Oromo corresponds well to Grayling's observation that "heroism is first and foremost the property of peacemakers. It takes infinitely greater courage to salvage a people or an epoch from conflict than to start or continue it (ibid.: 149). In the long run nevertheless, the peace of all is a *sine qua non* for personal growth and success, but it takes courage to look beyond the here and now.

Living a virtuous life for the sake of promoting peace requires resisting coercion and violence, particularly in a world, as Grayling has noted , where "it is very much easier to be intolerant, angry, jealous and resentful than it is to be generous, patient, kind and considerate" (ibid: 150) and it requires extraordinary courage and commitment. Peace needs goodwill and it cannot be achieved unless people are willing to give up immediate personal benefits for the sake of transcendent values such as peace. Thus, the Oromo indigenous concept of peace should not only be appreciated, but also appealed to if there is a genuine need of peace-building.

Peacemaking as a Grassroots Enterprise

The world suffers from wars, violence and conflict mainly because the promotion of peace is left to the discretion of a few leaders. Yet it is the majority of the people, particularly the weaker section of the society that suffers the incommodities of the absence of peace. The passivity and unconcern of the majority toward peace building and the defense of peace create opportunities for leaders to abuse their power. In most cases, leaders become tyrants not because they have unbeatable power, but because of the indifference of the majority. In Grayling's view, "it is in the laziness and inattention of majorities that tyranny finds its toehold, so that by the time people bethink themselves, it is too late to bestir themselves" (ibid. 144).

Thus, peace should not be the agenda of politicians alone; rather it must be the responsibility of each member of a given community. In the Oromo *Gadaa* system, almost all members of Oromo community participate actively in the promotion and maintenance of peace. The place of the concept of *nagaa* in Oromo society shows that Oromo culture is predominantly a culture of peace. If Ethiopia as a nation has a need to build peace and security, in the true sense of the word, it must genuinely empower its people towards making it. Luckily, the material for the construction of peace is available in the traditional values of the various communities. The *Gadaa* system of the Oromo society has its own

mechanisms to make its people work for and live in peace. The egalitarian ethos, communal solidarity, democratic governance structure, separation of powers, and civility in political deliberations are elements of the *Gadaa* system that allow people to be in control of their destiny and thus promote peace for the well-being of the collective (Levine 2007: 51).

Respect for Peace as a Mechanism of Peacemaking

In the Oromo world view, peace will develop and prevail if life conditions and environments are free of violence, strife and antagonisms. One necessary condition for that, according to their belief, is good governance and justice. Peace requires good administration. In the *Gadaa* system, as we have noted, power belongs to the people and is transferred peacefully to the legitimate age-set that rules on behalf of and is accountable to the people. Under ideal circumstances, Oromo laws are made by the people's representatives in ways that promote the interest of the people. The rule of law is a cardinal principle that governs politics and administration. The society upholds the values of caring and sharing and fights back against harmful and unethical acts and behaviors. These desirable moral and democratic values diminish the development of a political environment that fosters violence. Viewed from this angle *Gadaa* is a democratic system that promotes peace and social harmony.

In the Oromo thought system, human actions are born and flow from the human mind. The idea of peace or violence is conceived in the minds of individuals and then spills over to social life and relations. People practically behave, according to what they think about peace or violence. A person who has respect for peace is inclined to act in favor of peace and a person who has little respect for peace, according to Oromo conviction, acts more in favor of violence. In either case, the individual's disposition is not an innate condition, but a learned behavior. *Gadaa* officials thus endeavor to teach people to guard their minds from being polluted by evil thoughts and wicked ideas. In fact, the framework of predetermined actions given to age sets and classes in the *Gadaa* system implants the notions of peace, which are explained through demonstration and then take form in the mind. The assumption is that a person with a mind guided by *Gadaa* moral principles and egalitarian ethos is likely to act positively towards peace and harmony.

Traditional Peacemaking Mechanisms and the Modern Legal System

The Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanism has an important role in restoring peace that has been disturbed by conflict or violence. Conflict is intrinsically harmful, destructive, and expensive socially. The goal of conflict resolution, in the Oromo context, is the reconciliation of the parties engaged in conflict. In a broader sense, it not only aims to remove ill feelings between the reconciled parties, but also to

facilitate cooperation and comity. This has immense contribution to the wellbeing and peace of individuals and society. The moral strength of the Oromo mediation mechanism can be shown in comparison with the modern legal mechanisms as executed largely in Ethiopian courts and government agencies. This comparison is necessary to understand how practical, beneficial, and enduring the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is. Some of the major points are identified as follows.

Verdict vis-à-vis Resolution

When a verdict is passed in the court of law, the conflict is resolved by making one of the litigants the winner and the other the loser. This may punish the culprit but does not uproot animosity or diminish the urge for revenge. Instead of a chance to cleanse themselves of the mutual hostility, the parties in conflict are left with fresh ill-feeling towards one another. In this case, the conflict is not resolved but suppressed, and the resolution is temporary and reversible.

In contrast, conflict resolution in the context of the Oromo traditional mechanism is not an issue of winning or losing the case for one or the other party, unless the conflict emanated from the loss of life. Upon attainment of resolution, none of the disputants is declared winner or loser. Frequently, elders stress that the settlement of conflict is the triumph of the community over evil, not a victory of one party over the other. When conflict is resolved, what ensues is mutual understanding, not a feeling of euphoria for the victor and melancholy for the vanquished. The community holds the view that conflict resolution is an agreement arrived at by the conflicting sides through the efforts of mediators. Unless it changes the hostile environment between the parties into one of friendship, a resolution cannot be viewed as complete and fair. As such, the Oromo traditional mechanism of conflict resolution seems to be morally superior to the modern legal mechanism.

Ajudicating Facts vis-à-vis Restoring Values

In the Oromo traditional context, conflict resolution deals with facts and values – both indispensable to moral life. The modern method of settling conflicts through the court system, however, treats only the factual aspect of conflicts and ignores the values that are intertwined with the facts. Judges or juries do not look into the social norms and mores that were violated by the crime that was committed. They deliver a verdict based solely on the facts of the case to make resolution. The decision is incomplete because it does not resolve the issue at a deeper level, perhaps at a level where the criminal needed to be at peace with the principal aggrieved party, *Waaqa (*Bartels 1983: 291).

The Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanism takes into account not only facts but also values involved in the conflict. This is done

with reference to the already existing value system. Conflicts arise mainly when the value system that creates harmony is violated. Thus, when resolution is made the individuals are reconciled not only with each other but also with the value system of the society that they had violated. In this sense, the Oromo traditional way of settling conflicts deals with conflict in more profound and complete ways than the modern court system. Quite startlingly, the Oromo faith in the effectiveness of the traditional way of making peace, which is normally associated with the *Gadaa* system, was the preferred means even among Christian converts as recently as the 1970s (ibid: 253-254).

Professional Duty vis-à-vis Social Responsibility

In the modern conflict resolution mechanism in general and Ethiopian state courts in particular, legal activities and procedures that may not be clear and transparent to the parties of the conflict are pursued strictly as matters of professional routine. Judges and attorneys are motivated by the desire to get something done or to win a case for someone at any cost. The pursuit of truth and resolution of conflict are not the prime objectives of those who practice the law. This makes the court mechanism susceptible to abuse, opening the way for doing what is morally objectionable, such as rushing justice or winning on false premises, rather than what is morally indispensable, such as seeking truth and upholding the law. Where the greater good of society is not the ultimate goal, justice may be denied to one who deserves it and given to one who ought to pay the price for violating it. Then justice itself, in the sense of administering deserved punishment and reward, loses its meaning.

In the Oromo traditional method of conflict resolution, mediation is neither a profession nor a means for earning a living. It is the extraordinary social responsibility that comes with being a member of a given group. No compensation is paid or received for participating in resolving conflicts. The mediators render this social service motivated by good will and the desire to apply principles and conform to social expectations. It is thus assumed that they treat the case presented to them in good faith and to the best of their knowledge. What matters for them is the unconditional resolution of the conflict and the greater good of their society.

Moreover, the possibility that exposes the mediators to corruption is very limited. Even if there is an opportunity to resolve a conflict unfairly, the demand for transparency in the mechanism militates against corruption. The main reason why the Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is incorruptible is the care with which mediators are selected and the oath they take in the name of *Waaqa* to resolve the conflict in good faith. Elders with rich experience in mediation very often say, "We mediate mainly not for this or that person, but for the truth and for our soul. Doing good or bad in such matters is ultimately for or against oneself. To the best of our knowledge, we do what is good and right mainly for our conscience or soul

(author's interview with elders in West Shawa in 2005). The Oromo mechanism of conflict resolution, therefore, reduces the probability of abuse and corruption. In this sense, the Oromo traditional conflict resolution mechanism seems to be more practical and profound for the maintenance and building of peace than the modern court mechanism.

Other Practical Benefits

In indigenous conflict avoidance, peacemaking is an important mechanism of creating and applying an indigenous solution to local problems. In Ethiopia, the Oromo peacemaking has moral and social implications as well as a political mission. Local solutions reduce physical hardship on people. If a conflict is taken to the court of law in an urban setting for resolution, then rural disputants and other people directly or indirectly associated with the case have to travel long distances to get to the location where the case is being adjudicated. In the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, such hardships are virtually eliminated. Since the conflict is treated locally, using local norms and venues within the rural community, the parties are spared from suffering the vicissitudes of travel to and from the court.

Dealing with conflicts locally and through indigenous means has economic benefits. It minimizes the waste of money and time. For the management of conflict tried at the court of law relatively more money is needed for personal logistics, writing of documents, retaining of a lawyer, and perhaps for bribery. It is not only a lot of money that is spent, but also time that could be used for other productive purposes. In the indigenous mechanism, however, the disputants do not need to spend much money or time. They may spend small amounts on meals as expression of respect and gratitude to the mediators for resolving their conflict. Since such cases are always mediated on Sundays and on holidays, as is the case in West Shawa, the time that could be used for productive activities would not be wasted.

The process in the traditional conflict mechanism is transparent to all participants, including those who have a stake in the outcome. In contrast, the procedures to be pursued and the mechanisms to be employed to make a ruling may not be easily transparent and accessible to the disputants. As legal jargon replaces the layperson's language in court proceedings, the plaintiff and the defendant lose control of their case to a system that is foreign to them. It may not be the truth that wins, rather the art and the language of presentation, money, nepotism and the system itself. But in the traditional mechanism the conflicting parties know each and every detail of the mediation process. Thus, both parties have faith in the process and are willing to accept the decision even when it is not favorable.

Moral and Practical Weaknesses in Oromo Peacemaking

Despite its comparative moral strength outlined above, the Oromo traditional peacemaking has practical weaknesses that should be rectified for smoother operation in the modern context. One serious problem is that there is no written record or document of value that governs the process of peacemaking. References are largely based on orally transmitted laws and experiences. Even the details of the peacemaking procedure are not well documented. In recent times, the terms of agreement between the mediated parties have begun to be written and signed at the end of the process.

The lack of written reference and documentation is an area of traditional practice requiring articulation with current demands rather than a moral issue needing rectification. In the past, participants were aware of the authority of the word of the mediators. The norms, conventions, and experiences of the society were used as points of reference. More importantly, the trust in the traditional authority of mediators and the evidence of the case in point were sufficient to keep the process from falling into grave subjectivity. In an era where people have recourse to other avenues of conflict resolution, it is worth stressing the importance of record keeping in the process of peace making.

One can observe unfairness in Oromo peacemaking when the contest to be mediated is between a man and a woman. When the conflict between a husband and a wife is presented for mediation, it very often yields results that favor the husband. Such practices are observable in many areas of Oromia, as evidenced in my research area in West Shawa. It is true that when the issue of divorce is raised between husband and wife, the mediators use all means to make them remain together. Even if both parties decide that they should be divorced, the mediators do not let them do so before they make a thorough examination, because there is a perception that separation has a detrimental effect on the life of the couples' children (if they have any), and on the peace of the community (de Salviac 2005: 246-250). When divorce is unavoidable, the mediators divide the assets owned in common equally or unequally, depending on the case. Nevertheless, the wife is required to leave her home for the house is considered the husband's patrimony. The resolution consigns the wife to homelessness and landlessness while giving the husband the opportunity of remaining with his possessions. This makes the mechanism unfair.

The moral unfairness of the mechanism towards women can also be considered from another angle. Women are not eligible to participate in conflict resolution as mediators or judges. Although they play crucial roles in society, it is not clear why they are excluded from traditional conflict resolution. In fairness, Oromo culture requires a husband to be friendly, brotherly, and respectful to his wife. This is exemplified in the essence of the term *jaarti*i, literally an elderly woman, and an affectionate reference to a wife (ibid: 250). The exclusion of women from mediation and unequal treatment in settlements of marriage disputes is another moral weakness of

the Oromo peacemaking mechanism. Despite the weak points, the Oromo traditional conflict resolution mechanism, *jaarsumma*, immensely contributes to the maintenance and building of peace.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that not everything of traditional nature must be considered as useless and irrelevant and not everything of modern development should be believed as morally desirable and solution-offering. Both must be considered in terms of what problems they solve, and consequently to what extent they make life worth living.

The second important lesson to be learned from this inquiry pertains to the concept of peace in general. There has been fierce struggle between peace and war. It is still ongoing. And yet no one knows whether peace or war wins the battle at the end of the day. The mystery however, is that it is man who makes both war and peace, and it is again man who suffers from the destructive effects of war or enjoys the fruits of peace.

Let us put these questions as an invitation for further exploration of peace and war. If both peace and war are the work of human beings, then why is war so hated? Why is peace universally most sacred, cherished and respected? Why then, is peace, which has the support of billions, not able to win victory over war, which is despised by billions? What is the invisible force that inspires war? Why is peace that is most desired to triumph over unwanted war pursued with less vigor and determination?

REFERENCES

Aguilar, Mario. 1996. "Keeping the Peace of the *Waso Boorana*" In P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alesandro Triulzi (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainsitutet.

Anderson, Royce. 2004. "A Definition of Peace." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 10: 2, 101-116.

Bartels, Lambert. 1983. *Oromo Religion: Myth and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt   to Understand*. Berlin: Dietrich Reiner Veralg.

_____. 1994. "Pilgrimage to a Holy Tree". In D. Brokensha (ed.), *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Bassi, Marco. 1994. "*Gada* as an Integrative Factor of Political Organization." In D. Brokensha (ed.), *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

_____. 1996. "Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of *Gada*." In P. T. Baxter, et. al (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordiska   Afrikainstitutet.

Baxter, P.T. W. 1990. "Oromo Blessings." In A. Jacobson-Widding and Van Beck (eds.), *The Creative Communion: African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life*. Uppsala: Act Universitatis Uppsaliensis.

Bulcha, Mekuria. 1996. "The Survival and Reconstruction of Oromo National identity." In P. T. W. Baxter, et. al (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Craig, Edward. (ed.), 1998. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.

de' Salviac, Martial. 2005. *An Ancient People, Great African Nation: The Oromo*. Translated by Ayalew Kanno. East Lansing, MI.: Self Published.

Dahl, Gudrun. 1996. "Sources of Life and Identity." In P. T. W. Baxter, et. al. (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Grayling, A.C. 2005. *The Heart of Things: Applying Philosophy to the 21st Century*. London: Phoenix.

Helland, Johan. 1994. The Political Viability of *Borana* Pastoralists: Discussion of Some Features of the Political System of the *Borana* Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia. In D. Brokensha (ed.), *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of P. Baxter*. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Hultin, Jan. 1994. "The Land is Crying: State Intervention and Cultural Resistance among the *Matcha* Oromo." D. Brokensha (ed.), *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of P. Baxter*. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Legesse, Asmarom. 2000. *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

Levine, Donald. 1974. *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of Multiethnic Society*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

_____. 2007. "Oromo Narratives." *Journal of Oromo Studies*. 14: 2., 43-64

Lewis, Herbert. 2000. "Wealth, Influence and Prestige among the Shoa Gala." In Arthur Toden and Leonard Plotnicov (eds.), *Social Stratification in Africa*. NY: Free Press.

Megerssa, Gemetchu. 1994. Identity, Knowledge and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo of East and North East Africa. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of London, SoAs.

Oba, Gufu. 1996. "Shifting Identities along Resources Borders: Becoming and Continuing to be *Boorana* Oromo," in P. T. W. Baxter et. al. (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Pojman, P. Louis. 2005. *How Should We Live? An Introduction to Ethics*. Belmont, CA.: Thomson/Wadsworth.

_____. 2000. *Introduction to Philosophy. Classical and Contemporary Readings*. Belmont, CA.: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Tripathi, A. N. 2003. *Human Values*. New Delhi: New International Values.

CHAPTER XI

COMPARING OROMO AND
ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PHILOSOPHY

CHARLES C. VERHAREN

Scholarship on Oromo thought has reached the critical mass necessary to encourage extensive comparisons of Oromo thought with that of other cultures (Bartels 1983, Baxter 2005, Tablino 2005, Legesse 1973, Hassen 1990, Megerssa 1993, Zitelmann 2005, Gutema 2004, Jalata 2002). This article compares basic Oromo ontological and ethical principles with those of ancient Egypt. Its primary purpose is to encourage the development of comparative research programs on ancient Egyptian and Oromo philosophies. The term *philosophy* here means the most general and foundational guiding principles of life, expressed in oral or written form, together with critical reflection upon them (Oruka 1997, Verharen 2008). The article's scope cannot include questions of diffusion between the two cultures, although that direction would be a logical next step.

The article singles out ancient Egyptian culture for comparison with Oromo culture for several reasons. First, the lead article in a recent issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* hypothesizes that Oromo culture is derived from the ancient Meroitic culture (Megalomatis 2007). Its author proposes the hypothesis that an Ethiopian Emperor, Ezana, displaced the Meroites in an assault against Egypt up the Nile River in the fourth century CE. The Meroites fled south to occupy the traditional Oromo territory in the southern, southeastern and southwestern areas of what is now the modern state of Ethiopia.

Little scholarship exists on possible connections of Meroe to ancient Egypt, but Bruce Williams (1986) and David O'Connore's (1994) research determine the autonomous character of Nubian culture, as well as the possibility of two-way diffusion between Nubia and ancient Egypt. If links can be established between Nubia and ancient Egypt, Meroe must be examined as well. If Megalomatis' hypothesis should prove fruitful, then direct links may be established between ancient Egyptian and Oromo cultures.

Another reason for comparing the two cultures is Gemetchu Megerssa (1995) and Aneesa Kassam's (1995) hypothesis that Oromo culture is part of the ancient Cushitic cultures that extended from what is today called *Ethiopia* through ancient Egypt as far as India over the past three thousand years. This hypothesis suggests possibilities of direct linkage between Oromo and ancient Egyptian culture.

A further reason for the comparative study is that ancient Egyptian texts speak of travel between Egypt and the land of Punt to the south. The

most famous text that supports this assumption is the letter from the Pharaoh Neferkare to his vizier, Harkhuf. Harkhuf was on a voyage from Egypt to the extreme south and he reported to his Pharaoh Neferkare that he found a Twa (formerly called *pygmy*) in these southern regions. The Pharaoh issued an urgent reply to Harkhuf's report: "You have said in this dispatch of yours that you have brought a Twa of the god's dances from the land of the horizon-dwellers…Come north to the residence at once! Hurry and bring with you this Twa whom you brought from the land of the horizon-dwellers, live, hale, and healthy, for the dances of the god, to gladden the heart, to delight the heart of King Neferkare who lives forever!" (quoted in Asante and Abarry 1996: 451).

This exchange reveals that the Egyptians had the technology for coastal voyaging on the Red Sea. It is possible that the ancient Ethiopian Empire of Axum very likely started not only in the Ethiopian highlands but also on the shores of the Red Sea at Adulis in the first millennium BCE (Casson 1989). Coincidentally, Adulis was the "port through which Meroe exported its produce" (Reader 1997: 204). Archaeologists have dated the ancient temple of the Axumite culture at Yeha in northern Ethiopia only to around 500 BCE. It should be noted, however, that very little archaeological work has been done to establish a time frame here by reason of the Italian/Ethiopian conflict which dates back to the birth of archaeology as an academic discipline. Internecine strife between Ethiopia and Eritrea after the Italians had been removed from the scene continued to keep the area inaccessible to scholars. The Axumite Empire straddled the present border between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The fourth reason for comparing Oromo and ancient Egypt is the recurrent hypothesis, most forcefully advocated by the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop, that ancient Egypt exerted a strong cultural influence on more southerly Africa. This hypothesis begs examination in the region immediately south of Egypt – Oromia. Diop's research compared Egyptian and West African cultures at a far distance from Egypt. His claims about language affiliations between the ancient Egyptian language and his native Wolof are sketchy at best (1991/1981). African research institutions such as his own IFAN and Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar have had little incentive and no research funds to pursue his research hypothesis since his death. The most significant book showing deep affinities between ancient Egypt and other African cultures, *Egypt in Africa* (Celenko 1996), is a relatively recent production and it has so far generated few successors. Comparing ancient Egyptian and East African cultures would be a means to test Diop's hypothesis.

These four reasons admittedly are highly generalized yet they still furnish an intriguing, attractive rationale for conducting comparative research on ancient Egyptian and other African cultures. More specific reasons for comparing Oromo thought with ancient Egyptian are fourfold. First, the ontological and ethical analogues between the two cultures are so strong as not to be coincidental – consequently a hypothesis of cultural

diffusion calls out for investigation. Second, finding strong analogues between these two cultures and evidence of cultural diffusion should motivate further research, both in Ethiopia and other African nations, into the mechanisms of cross-fertilization of philosophy and culture throughout Africa. Third, Oromo culture is an excellent starting point for such research because of the advanced state of its study and because of its geographical and conceptual proximity to ancient Egypt.

The fourth reason is that this cross-cultural research can lead to a re-conceptualization of African philosophy. This rationale is far more abstract but paradoxically has all the more force for a re-conceptualization of Africa herself. This reason assumes that philosophies are the guiding foundations of cultures (Verharen 2003, 2008). Non – African philosophies have failed Africa in the harshest possible ways, from the Arabic and European enslavement of African persons to the colonial plundering of Africa's resources (e.g., the Belgian Congo) to the post colonial manipulation of African nation-building in the Cold war (e.g., Lumumba's assassination) to the present chaos in southern (e.g., Zimbabwe), western (e.g., Ivory Coast), and eastern (e.g., Sudan, Somalia, Kenya) Africa (Verharen 1997). Speaking more generally, non-African philosophies have failed the world itself. A philosophy should at the very least be an instrument for survival. Western – style cultures have found it expedient to develop technologies capable of mass destruction. We now confront the annihilation of life as we know it through nuclear winter or global warming. Let us return to Africa herself, as Cheikh Anta Diop has said in his *Civilization or Barbarism*, to seek an African way out of impending catastrophe that threatens both Africa and the world. And let us see whether within Africa we may discover an already existing philosophy that has the potential, as Frantz Fanon said, to make Africa one (Fanon 1963: 178; Verharen 2006).

BEGINNINGS AND ASPIRATIONS

My initial interest in Oromo philosophy derives in part from my research into the writings of Messay Kebede, a former chair of the Department of Philosophy of Addis Ababa University (2004, 1998; Verharen 2008). Kebede's writing attracted me because he was searching through African philosophy for a salvific myth for the decolonization of Africa. For Kebede, the myth had to come out of Africa – not out of a European utopia, whether Christian or Marxist.

In my opinion, Kebede's search failed. After rejecting prominent African philosophers' ideas for decolonization, Kebede seized upon Leopold Sedar Senghor's Negritude and what he calls Diop's Afrocentrism. Kebede faulted Senghor because his version of Negritude was deterministic. Kebede would correct Negritude philosophy by claiming that Africans were emotional (rather than rational, as were Europeans) and artistic by choice rather than by generic or environmental constraints.

Kebede does not advert to the fact that Negritude presents a false image of Africans (Kebede 2004: 219 – 220).

Kebede holds that Diop's virtue is to help Africans feel good about themselves because their ancestors created the pyramids (ibid. 219). Kebede does not begin to grasp Diop's real virtue. Diop believed that the Egyptians were African and that Africans can claim the pyramids as part of their cultural heritage. But that fact is immaterial to Diop's Sankofa view of Egyptian culture: Look back and take it! What is important about Egypt is not the past, but rather what use Africans can make of ancient Egyptian culture in the present. The Sankofa bird, an Akan symbol from Ghana, looks back over its shoulder in order to recapture its history to plan for the future. Diop believed that the ancient Egyptians laid the foundations for rationality and science in the Mediterranean basin. In his words, "by renewing ties with Egypt we soon discover an historical perspective of five thousand years that makes possible the diachronic study, on our land, of all the scientific disciplines that we are trying to integrate into modern African thought" (1993: 4).

Thus, this paper searches for analogues between ancient Egyptian thought and traditional Oromo thought in Ethiopia. I am particularly interested in determining whether there may be an homologous philosophy shared by many African cultures. What has become of ancient Egyptian philosophy in Africa over time? Has it been extinguished, like ancient Egyptian culture itself? Or has it been transformed into other African variations readily accessible to those who keep their eyes open to the real Africa, not the Africa of myth and distorted history? And what influence might other parts of Africa have had on ancient Egypt?

Striking parallels between ancient Egyptian and Oromo thought may be explained by cultural diffusion from ancient Egypt to today's Ethiopia region. But the opposite must be considered as well. Some scholars argue that Oromo culture derives from an earlier Cushitic culture that stretched from present day Ethiopia to ancient Egypt to ancient India three thousand years ago, with connections to ancient Egyptian culture (Megerssa 1995: 11-12; Kassam 1995: 10). Since ancient Egyptian thought may be dated back some 5000 years due to specialized methods of record-keeping, diffusion from the Cushites to the Egyptians is at present difficult to investigate using current methodologies. The paper's scope cannot consider these wider questions. Its principal purpose is to furnish good reasons for initiating a comparative research program on ancient Egyptian and Oromo philosophy.

My interest in traditional Oromo philosophy started while on sabbatical in Ethiopia at Addis Ababa University doing research on Kebede's program for decolonization of Africa. My motive was to start a research program on traditional Ethiopian philosophy. One of my colleagues, Bekele Gutema, an Oromo who is keenly interested in Oromo philosophy, introduced me to Gemetchu Megerssa, an Oromo and a social anthropologist who wrote his dissertation on Oromo world view. I was

privileged to spend many hours of conversation with both scholars, and to conduct field research in Ambo (a small town 100 kilometers west of Addis Ababa) with Bekele, interviewing two Oromo elders.

Because of the prescriptions of Alain Locke (1989), the first chair of my department at Howard University, I felt strongly that anthropology had to play an important role in philosophical research. The essay relies on Megerssa's revised PhD dissertation for its analysis of Oromo ontology and ethics. His interpretation of Oromo ontology is holistic, as we shall see, and it differs from those of other scholars of the Oromo such as Lambert Bartels (1983) and Bekele Gutema (personal communication, April 1- July 31, 2007). My intention here is not to argue for the merits of Megerssa's version of Oromo ontology, but to examine it for the purpose of stimulating research.

OROMO ONTOLOGY

Why is Oromo traditional philosophy a fitting beginning for studying analogues to ancient Egyptian philosophy in the Africa outside of Egypt? Consider Megerssa's version of the cosmology of the Oromo taken from his informant, Dabassa Guyyo. In the beginning, the primordial monotheistic God, *Waaqa,* created the universe out of water: "in the beginning there was nothing but water" (Megerssa 1993: 58). My research does not yet indicate whether *Waaqa* and water co-exist primordially, or whether *Waaqa's* first act of creation is water. In either case, water here is not the familiar water of our experience but a "primordial substance" designated as *Walaabu* (ibid.). *Waaqa* creates the universe out of this first element, using principles, thoughts, words called *ayyaana* whose origin "is linked to that of the sun" (ibid). Megerssa defines *ayyaana* as "the creative act of thinking in which a thought becomes that which it mentally represents" (ibid., 126*). Ayyaana* is a complex concept. God causes all existence through the creative force of the *ayyaana,* but a principle of *ayyaana* actually "becomes that which it has caused to come into being" (ibid.).

The concept of *Waaqa* is even more complex than that of the *ayyaana,* but both existences share a common property. Both become what they have created. *Waaqa* is often translated as the *sky god,* but the term suggests a god beyond creation rather than a literal or anthropomorphic sky god (ibid, 50). *Waaqa* is often modified by the term *guraacha,* which ordinarily means "black," but can also mean that which is "in its original state" (ibid., 8). According to Megerssa, the Oromo believe that "darkness is the original state, while light is interference with the original state" (ibid.). *Waaqa* is *guraacha* in the sense of "blackness," the mystery that cannot be revealed, that which is unknowable or incomprehensible. The fact of *Waaqa's* existence is not a mystery; it can be known through the principle of causality. However, the nature of *Waaqa* must remain completely opaque, *black* in the deepest sense. Megerssa translates *Waaqa guraacha* as "black creator for lack of a better word" (ibid.).

What is distinctive about this "Black Creator" is its holistic nature, which makes it quite distinct from the monotheistic God of the Hebrew, Christian, and Muslim traditions. The God of "The Book" is an infinitely perfect spiritual being that creates a physical universe out of nothing. In these traditions, the spiritual and material are distinct kinds of existence, so their cosmologies must be dualistic. God's nature is not mysterious in that "He" is revealed as a divine person with intelligence and will in the biblical texts. What is mysterious is how what is physical can come out of what is spiritual.

In contrast to the God of the Bible, *Waaqa* creates the universe out of itself. On Megerssa's account of Oromo holism, God is both the creator and the created: "*Waaqa* exists at the same time through his creation and independently of it. He is both the creator and his creation" (ibid., 137). Paradoxically, God is "one and many" (ibid., 50). The clearest analogue to this cosmology in European philosophy is Benedict Spinoza's (2000/1667) concept of God as *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*. God and the universe or nature constitutes a single being. However, this being may be viewed as nature in the act of creating itself, or as nature in the state of having been created. *Waaqa* is analogous to Spinoza's God in that "God, through his creative power, is placed within the world" (ibid.).

However, Megerssa would insist on a distinction between the two Gods. Emphasizing the "blackness" or mysterious nature of *Waaqa,* Megerssa claims that the Oromo cosmology sees "*Waaqa* as part of the world as well as external to it"; in this way, "the Oromo cosmology unites under a principal single function what are otherwise considered opposites" (ibid., 137). By the principle of causality, we can know that *Waaqa* has made the universe out of himself. By the principle of *Waaqa's* "blackness," we cannot begin to know what other universes he may have created, or indeed whether his creation extends far beyond a universe as we can conceive it.

Making this point explicitly, Megerssa claims that "*Waaqa* … represents the highest form of abstraction unifying the whole of nature and more … more because *Waaqa* is believed to be greater than the sum of his creation" (ibid., 138). Reflection on the term *abstraction* is in order here. The term comes from roots that mean literally "pulled away from." An abstraction is a conceptual pattern extracted from experience or imagination and used to link together all similar experiences. To abstract is to unify experience. Abstractions approximate the "highest form" that Megerssa speaks of when their patterns begin to cover all possible experience. The pattern that all things in the universe share is their derivation from *Waaqa.* As the "highest form of abstraction, *Waaqa* is the totality of Nature" (ibid., 139).

Yet we are not certain whether Oromo cosmology follows a principle of creation via emanation or creation as evolution. The former has parallels in Plotinus' philosophy wherein the universe "emanates" from an original light. The latter has parallels in contemporary cosmology where a chaotic

universe organizes itself according to evolutionary principles that yield life and finally intelligent life. Parallels to the Oromo holistic ontology are found in the Chinese philosophy of Taoism which holds that reality is a composite of two opposing principles, *yang and yin, yin and yang, the passive and the active*, the active and the passive.

The strongest analogues to Oromo cosmology, however, are to be discovered in ancient Egypt. Both philosophies insist on the mysterious nature of the origins of the universe. Both claim that the first principle of creation is a primordial water, although the Egyptians further specify its nature as chaotic. As we have seen above, the Oromo call this creative water *walaabu*, which must be distinguished from *Madda Walaabu*, water in a specific geographic location. The ancient Egyptians call it *Nun*. Both philosophies hold that primordial water is organized by creative principles, called *ayyaana* by the Oromo and *khepera* by the Egyptians. *Khepera* is translated as *becoming* (Hornung1990/1982). The principles of *Khepera* are immanent within *Nun*, and their self-organizing process creates the powerful force manifested as the sun or *Ra*. As we have seen above, the creative principle of *ayyaana* are also linked to the sun. Both traditions postulate an evolution from an inert substance, water, to an active principle, the sun. The *ayyaana* in the Oromo tradition constitute the ordering process whereby the sun emerges from the primordial water. The *ayyaana* through the sun start "the process of time and creation, through which all things come to life (Megerssa 1993: 58).

Ancient Egyptian cosmology takes a decidedly anthropocentric turn, as the solitary *Ra* in an act of spitting or masturbating creates two of the basic principles of the universe. These two principles, no longer solitary, create, in an act of copulation, two other basic principles. The four principles collectively are analogous to the familiar material principles of earth, air, fire, and water (as we experience it, rather than as a primordial chaotic water or *Nun*). The second set of material principles creates the anthropomorphic Egyptian gods such as Osiris, Isis, Set, Horus, and Nepthys. These gods in turn create humans and the world as we know it. (Hornung 1982/1971).

Oromo and ancient Egyptian cosmology diverge sharply here, as the Oromo do not express their views in an anthropomorphic way. As instruments of creation, the *ayyaana* of the Oromo are abstract principles rather than personifications of forces. What is important for the purposes of my comparison is the underlying assumption of the oneness of the creator and what is created. Both philosophies are holistic or monistic in the sense that they affirm only one principle of reality. The universe as we know it is an expression of that principle. The scope of this paper permits no investigation of the legitimacy of this principle. However, both philosophies capture perfectly the unifying spirit of human thought (Assman 1998).

All philosophies and religions that bind the universe together under a single unifying principle are expressions of the mind at work. Holistic

philosophies push that principle to the limit by collapsing the creator and the creation into a single existent. Ancient Egyptian philosophy is more extreme on this point than Oromo philosophy under Megerssa's interpretation. The *Nun,* the primordial chaotic water of the Egyptians, has no originating principle other than itself. Like the hydrogen atoms comprising the "Big Bang" of contemporary cosmology, the *Nun* transforms itself into a highly organized universe organized around the sun. However, the universe collapses back into the *Nun* to start the cycle all over again, as *The ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* states in Spell 175, i. e., while life shall continue for "millions on millions of years, a life-time of millions of years," in the end the *Nun* "will destroy all that I have made; the earth shall return to the Abyss, to the surging flood, as in its original state" (Faulkner 2005: 201). The Egyptian model follows the same dynamic as a contemporary cosmological model that collapses the universe back into itself to start another Big Bang by reason of gravitational force (Hornung 2001/1999). The Oromo model as interpreted by Megerssa postulates a creative force outside of *Walaabu*, the primordial water. Megerssa insists on the unknowable and irreducible nature of the creator of the universe in the Oromo tradition.

Nonetheless, these distinctions between Oromo and ancient Egyptian philosophy are vanishingly small in the face of their distance from dualist or pluralist philosophies. Scholars like Martin Bernal (1989) who trace the origins of ancient Greek philosophy to ancient Egypt pass over the radical division between the two schools of thought. Against Egyptian holism, Plato postulates an ontology of irreducible principles: at one extreme, the form as perfect, non-physical patterns, and at other a chaotic physical universe. A divine craftsman organizes the universe as we know it out of chaos using the forms of a divine "blueprint".

To look beyond the Mediterranean basin, Hindu philosophy espouses a nominal holism in claiming that all reality reduces to a single principle, *Brahman.* The manifest plurality of the universe as we experience it is explained away as an illusion, *maya.* Hinduism achieves its holism only At the cost of denying the reality of our manifest experience. However, Taoism in East Asia and Spinoza in Europe show that the holistic philosophy is not unique to Africa (Rhadakrishnan and Moore, 1967 and Chan, 1969). An investigation into Oromo and ancient Egyptian ethics can suggest that the ontological similarities of these philosophies may not be accidental.

OROMO ETHICS

Megerssa defines *Waaqa* as the "Totality of Nature" (1993: 139). Every philosophy that conflates the creator and the created faces the problem of explaining evil in the universe (Verharen 1998). Evil can take two forms – natural disasters that cause human suffering and suffering that humans inflict on themselves. Megerssa claims that the Oromo explain the first kind of evil as intrinsic to nature. As expression of the totality of

nature, such disasters are manifestations of God's best efforts to keep the universe together. Hence the Oromo "accept the conditions imposed on them by *Waaqa;* they regard natural disasters as "events which occur for the good of the whole" (ibid). The point of nature is the "harmony of the whole" which "transcends the parts" (ibid). Whatever happens is an expression of the Totality of Nature, Universal Nature, and "must therefore be right" (Ibid).

Evil caused by humans in the universe arises from human incapacity to act "in harmony with the cosmic whole," in as much as "it is only man who fails to act in accordance with the natural laws set down by *Waaqa"* (Ibid., 140). Humans can choose between good and evil since they have a natural capacity to tell the two apart. *Waaqa* in the form of "Universal Nature" has made humans into "moral agent[s]" as "conscious participant[s] in the natural process of the universe" (Ibid.).

Morality flows out of the nature of the universe, the totality of which is God himself. Ontology, the study of what exists, axiology, the study of what is valuable, are inseparable for the Oromo. Human laws must be derived from natural laws. In Megerssa's words, the"laws made by man thus act as a social control, preventing evil deeds from overwhelming the harmony of the cosmic whole" (Ibid.). The Oromo characterize the totality of nature in an anthropomorphic way. Human sins against nature's harmony "release the anger of the Totality of Nature" (Ibid.).

The concept of harmony is key to understanding Oromo ethics. It is also the foundation of ancient Egyptian ethics in the principle of *maat* as I shall discuss more fully at the conclusion of this section on ethics. The Oromo parallel to *maat* is found in the concept of *nagaa* or peace and harmony. *Nagaa* is achieved by following *safuu* or the moral code. The moral code dictates the proper order for biological and social development, which is termed *finna*. The concept of *finna* or *fidnaa* is given a biological exposition in Megerssa's interview of Dabassa Guyyo, an Oromo oral historian and philosopher.

Oromo ethics are grounded in the biological concept of growth and *guddina*. The metaphor of growth extends to the development of social groups. The general path of biological development and human growth follows an order called *finna*. That order may be good or bad.

Guddina literally means "an increase in what is given," as in the growth of hair or tree. Growth following the harmony or order of the Totality of Nature leads to well-being or *gabbina.* The root meaning of *gabbina* is "growing fat." This is an apt metaphor for groups whose food supplies are dependent on the weather's vagaries. The more general sense of the word indicates biological growth or human development in accord with greatest potential. An organism, including human organisms, in a state of well-being grows naturally to express its nature. This natural growth is called *ballina.* The organism growing in accord with its environment is said to be in a state of harmony or *badhaadhaa. Badhaadhaa* is defined as a state of having *gabbina*, *guddina*, and *ballina* "favored by conditions such

as peace… and all other conditions necessary for the well-being of life" (Megerssa, personal communication, 2007). *Badhaadhaa* includes both individual organisms and societies whose people, property, custom and law are so complete that they increase themselves (Ibid.).

Organisms in harmony with their environments naturally reproduce themselves through acts of replication called *hormaata.* Such organisms grow through a repetition of rounds, called *dagaaga*, that change the state of the organism or society while still preserving its identity. *Dagaaga* literally means a " ram's horn." The metaphor of the spiral growth of the horn captures its identity in difference. Organisms or societies that successfully pass through the six stages have the power to transmit themselves into new territories in a process called *daga-horaa*. (Megerssa 1993: 121).

What is true for organisms is also true for human societies. Groups that find exemplary means for living in harmony with the Totality of Nature become such powerful examples of the will of *Waaqa* that other groups rush to imitate them. The laws, *seera,* and customs, *aadaa,* of such groups flow directly from the harmony of nature (Ibid. 122).

The totality of the seven steps is called *finna* in the Oromo language. The word may derive from the root *fin* which means *embryo* in the Arsi dialect of Oromo (Megerssa, personnal communication, June 14, 2007). *Finna* may be both good and bad. Expressions of the seven steps of growth which are out of harmony with the Totality of Nature are in an evil state of *finna.* Megerssa's informant, Dabassa Guyyo, insists that contemporary Oromo peoples exist in an evil (*hamtu* in Oromo) state of *finna* because their economic, political, and cultural subjection to the Amhara minorities of Ethiopia (Ibid., 127).

That Oromo concept of *safuu* determines whether a *finna* is good or evil. *Finna* specifies the concept of order or development, and *safuu* dictates the quality of that order. In Megerssa's words "*safuu* provides the moral and ethical code according to which events, whether at personal, social or cosmic level take place" (Megerssa 1993, 138). *Waaqa* generates the ethical code and propagates it through *ayyaana*. Living according to the code of *safuu* is the only means to a "full and happy life" (Ibid.).

The measure of an individual or society's ability to live according to the code of *safuu* is found in the Oromo concept of *nagaa,* which is defined literally as "peace" but carries extended meanings such as "harmony," "order," "balance," "justice" (Dewo 2008). Organisms are "at peace" with their environments and one another when they contribute to mutual flourishing. Societies must possess both an internal and external harmony with respect to their environments and their neighbors (Kelbessa 2005). The Oromo *Gadaa* system (the traditional socio-political structure of the Oromo based on generation – sets) aims at sustaining peace through its extensive conflict resolution mechanism such as the *jaarsummaa,* a council of elders that focuses on mediation (Dewo 2008, 159-162; Legesse 2001, 1973).

The Oromo use of the concept of *nagaa* or peace to test their adherence to *safuu* or the moral code calls to mind the ancient Egyptian concept of *maat,* the peace, harmony, order, balance that must characterize our responsibility to the continuance of life. Spell 125, The Declaration of Innocence in the *Book of the Dead,* details a moral life: "I have not deprived the orphan of his property… I have not caused pain, I have not made hungry, I have not made to weep, I have not killed, I have commanded to kill" (Faulkner 2005: 134). Morality extends beyond obligations to other humans: "I have not deprived herds of their pastures, I have not trapped the birds from the preserves of the gods, I have not diverted water at its season, I have not built a dam on flowing water." (Ibid.). *Maat* is given mythological status as a goddess. The primary responsibility of the Pharaoh is to ensure that *maat* is the regulatory principle of his kingdom.

Like the ancient Egyptians, the Oromo share the idea that all humans are subject to a universal principle of harmony and order, *nagaa* – from the elected leaders of the *Gadaa* to the lowliest herd boy. Gender discrimination is an issue in the older Oromo traditions, but the Oromo have the distinction of being much more egalitarian than the Egyptians. The Oromo fostered a tradition of electing leaders, while the Egyptians made a place for women to rule – although Hatshepsut, for example, was both an exception to male rule and was accorded the status of honorary male (Roehrig 2005).

A compelling research project would examine how homologous philosophical principles like *nagaa* and *maat* can inform such diverse political and economic systems. Bio-geographical determinists might claim with Marx that agricultural systems with extensive surplus and large populations necessitate hierarchical societies (Diamond 1997). Pastoralism may be more conducive to a democratic communalism. Hypotheses issuing from a comparative study of ancient Egyptian and Oromo politics and economics would need to be tested against a wide array of African cultures.

CULTURAL BLINDNESS AND RESEARCH PROGRAMS

My preliminary research makes the case that Oromo and ancient Egyptian thought deserves extensive cross-cultural research programs. Is there evidence of a more widespread presence of homologous philosophies in Africa, with holistic ontologies and cosmologies, and ethics of harmony and balance? Research already gathered on Oromo culture should be compared to the research done on other indigenous Ethiopian cultures. Claude Sumner's (1995, 1996a, 1996b; see Kidane 2002) compilations on Oromo "Wisdom Literature" are a starting point for this research. However, the failure of scholarship to pay attention to analogues to ancient Egyptian philosophy in northern Africa shows how hard it will be to encourage a wider cross-cultural examination of historical philosophy in Africa.

Consider the analogues between ancient Egyptian thought and Gnosticism. Gnosticism is generally described as a syncretic religion that

began in the centuries before Christ. Its many schools have in common the view that a specialized kind of knowledge is required to understand the nature of life and the universe in order to achieve salvation (King 2003). One of the most important Gnostics was Valentinus who was born and educated in Egypt in the second century C. E. Unlike most other Gnostic figures, Valentinus subscribed to a monistic philosophy. *The Gospel of Truth,* usually ascribed to Valentinus, pictures God as *pleroma,* the fullness and unity of true existence, or as a *bythos* a depth out of which all existence arises. God is shrouded in mystery and can only be known through his creation. God as *pleroma* or *bythos* creates the universe through emanation. Any sense of a separation between God and his creation derives from human ignorance. Salvation is achieved through returning to the one – an act achieved by coming to knowledge of oneself as one with God.

Valentinus left Alexandria in Egypt for Rome where he was said to be a candidate for bishop of Rome. Accounts differ as to whether he refused the position or was not elected. His philosophy is very much at odds with dualistic Christian philosophy. Valentinus' "heresy" faded with the overpowering success of "orthodox" Christianity in the Mediterranean basin, and was completely obliterated with the Muslim conquest of North Africa (Rudolph 1983).

As monistic, Valentinus' version of Gnosticism is unique. However, as a holistic philosophy, it is directly analogous to ancient Egyptian – and by extension to Oromo philosophy as well. However, scholarship on Gnosticism in general and Valentinus in particular does not carefully address the hypothesis that Valentinus' belief may be grounded in ancient Egyptian philosophy. A recent review of the critical scholarship on Gnosticism acknowledges that he was born in Egypt in the second century C. E., but the review makes no effort to connect his thought with ancient Egyptian thought (King 2003). Although older researchers viewed Gnosticism as arising as a Christian heresy, scholarly consensus now indicates that the movement predated Christianity. The most often cited origins are Greek, Jewish, Persian and Indian. Very few scholars cite ancient Egyptian thought as an inspiration for Gnosticism. An exception is the 19th century scholar Emile Amelineau (1887) who argues that ancient Egyptian thought is a primary influence not only on Gnosticism but also on Plato's *Timaeus.*

Valentinus is not alone in failing to attract comparative research between his philosophy and that of ancient Egypt. A later and more heralded philosopher, Plotinus, also born in Egypt but in the third century C. E., produced a monistic philosophy that has come to be called "neo-Platonic." Certainly Plotinus wrote in Greek, but the basic tenet of his philosophy is monistic, quite unlike that of Plato. While Plato insists upon a rigid demarcation between spirit and matter, Plotinus holds that the universe "emanates" from God in the same fashion as light proceeds from the sun (Gerson 1996). Unlike Plato, Plotinus follows the tradition of the pre-Socratic philosophers who argue for a monistic philosophy that has its

origins in water (Thales), fire (Heraclitus), atoms (Democritus), and numbers (Pythagoras). Whether the pre-Socratic philosophers were themselves influenced by ancient Egyptian thought is a matter of contention (Citing numerous ancient Greek thoughts, Martin Bernal (1989) argues that seminal Greek philosophers like Pythagoras and Plato derived key concepts from their studies in Egypt).

What cannot be disputed is that Plotinus follows in the Pre-Socratic tradition. However, Plotinus was raised in Egypt, and his philosophy in principle is monistic, like both ancient Egyptian and pre-Socratic philosophy. Scholarship has not seriously considered to date whether or to what degree he may have been influenced by Egyptian philosophy. This lacuna is unremarkable because classical scholars do not traditionally include ancient Egyptian among their research languages.

To speak more generally, instead of looking for analogues between ancient Egypt, the most technically productive of the ancient Mediterranean cultures, and other philosophies and religions, comparative scholarship has to a great extent ignored ancient Egypt as if it could not have influenced in significant ways other cultures within the basin. Martin Bernal has made a case for diffusion between ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, but we need a much more ampliative posture. Gnosticism is an obvious candidate for comparison. Unlike Bernal, I do not suspect that a conspiracy of silence has blocked possible research avenues. Rather I think general ignorance of the details of ancient Egyptian philosophy and religion has created a failure of imagination that hides these avenues.

On the other hand, I do not want to go too far. Gnostic philosophy is clearly in Hans Jonas' words "pathomorphic", or grounded in the idea of a fall from grace or a moral blindness that can be healed by the sacred gnosis (King 2003: 121 citing Jonas 1966). Ancient Egyptian philosophy, on the other hand, is to coin a phrase "eumorphic," centered in a conviction that the universe as we find it is good. The evils of natural catastrophes, the wickedness of human deeds, are aberrations from the harmony of *maat*. It is our ethical task to restore what is disordered to its naturally perfect state. There can be no "fall from grace" in the ancient Egyptian system, except through deliberate choice. As in the Oromo philosophy, chaos can erupt without warning, but chaos is limited to its seasons. Both Oromo and ancient Egyptian philosophy agree that life is good in itself and not for the sake of something else. Chaos erupts into life through natural or human causes, but it is manageable. Ethics in both philosophies demands the restoration of order and harmony, *nagaa* and *maat*.

CONCLUSION

What might be the practical consequences of this proposed research program? Its primary theoretical objective is to contribute to mapping the flow of philosophy in Africa. If research shows that the analogues between ancient Egyptian and Oromo philosophy are the likely result of diffusion

rather than coincidence, then this research program would make a strong case for further comparative work in East and West Africa.

The practical objective of this research program is to discover a philosophy that can rescue Africa and the world from imminent catastrophe. We now confront the "bankruptcy" (Amiri Baraka's term) of world philosophies that can no longer serve as inspirations for how we should live as a global community, intent on passing life on to our children's children. The global threats to life we now face result in part from the failures of world-historical philosophies and religions to find the meaning of life in life itself. Powerful, contemporary versions of the religions of "The Book" – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – present life as a test rather than an end in itself, but space does not allow careful consideration of whether these contemporary versions are faithful to their progenitors. Hinduism regards life an illusion. Buddhism advocates transcending desire- a defining characteristic of life – to stop suffering.

In the spirit of looking for Messay Kebede's inspiring myth out of Africa, let us consider for the future the common message from both the ancient Egyptians and the Oromo (Verharen 2008). Both advocate a philosophy of holism, the conflation of ontology and axiology. That holism underpins the famous democracy of the Oromo *Gadaa* system as well as the Oromo respect for the environment and its inhabitants. Workineh Kelbessa's (2005) research on the rehabilitation of indigenous environmental ethics in Africa demonstrates the practical consequences of Oromo holism. Maulana Karenga's (2003) research on *Maatian* ethical responsibilities to strangers, women, and ecosystems illustrates the revolutionary character of ancient Egyptian thought – for its time and for our own. The philosophical principles of *maat* and *nagaa* have demonstrated their practical force over long periods of time. *Maat* was the controlling element of ancient Egyptian philosophy for three thousand years. *Nagaa's* longevity is a matter for further research, but its force is as old as Oromia. Whether it may equal *maat's* longevity is a key question for this research program. What is beyond dispute is that together the philosophies of *maat* and *nagaa* promise an African model for passing life on to future generations in these perilous times.

REFERENCES

Amelineau, Emile. 1887. *Essai sur le Gnosticisme Egyptien, ses Developments et son Origine Egyptienne*. Paris: Annales du Musee Guimet. Vol. xiv.

Asante, Molefi and Abarry, Abu, eds. 1996. *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Assman, Jan. 1998. *Mosses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bartels, Lambert. 1983. *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of Western Ethiopia, An Attempt to Understand.* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag.

Baxter, Paul and Kassam, Aneesa. 2005. Performing the *Soodduu* Ritual: Introduction to the Special Issue of the *Journal Oromo Studies* in Memory of Father Lambert Bartels, *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12: 1&2, 1-20.

Bernal, Martin. 1989. *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (The Foundation of Ancient Greece 1785- 1985).* Vol.1. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Casson, Lionel. 1989. *The Periplus Maris Erythrae*i. Princton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Celenko, Theodore. ed. 1996. *Egypt in Africa*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana.

Chan, Wing-Tsit, trans. 1969. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dewo, Tenna. 2008. "The Concept of Peace in the Oromo *Gadaa* System: Its Mechanisms and Moral Dimension." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 15: 1 (March), 139-179.

Diamond, Jared. 1997. *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: Norton.

Diop, Cheik Anta. 1991/1981. *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. Trans. Ya-Lengi Meema. Chicago: Lawrence Hill.

Fanon, Frantz. 1963. This Africa to Come. *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*. Trans. H. Chevalier. New York: Grove 177-190.

Faulkner, Raymond. O., trans. 2005/1972. *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead.* New York: Barnes and Noble.

Gerson, Lloyd P., ed. 1996. *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gutema, Bekele. 2004. Introducing Intercultural Philosophy, *EJOSSAH: Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities* 2: 2, (December), 29-49.

Hassen, Mohammed. 1990. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570- 1860.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hornung, Erik. 2001/1999. *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West*. D. Lorton, trans. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

_____. 1990/1982. *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*. Trans. J. Baines. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

_____. 1982/1971. *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity.* Trans. D. Warburton. New York: Timken.

Jalata, Asafa. 2002. *Fighting Against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements.* NY: Palgrave

Jonas, Hans. 1967. Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon – Typological and Historical, in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo Colloquio di Messina 13-18 Aprile 1966,* pp. 90-108. Ed. Ugo Bianchi. SHR XII. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Karenga, Maulana. 2003. *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt.* New York and Oxford: Routledge.

Kassam, Aneesa. 1995. *Gabra.* New York: Rosen Publishing.

Kebede, Messay. 2004. *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization.* Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.

_____. 1988. *Africa and Philosophy: The Case of Ethiopia.* Unpublished Manuscript. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, College of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy.

Kelbessa, Workineh. 2005. The Rehabilitation of Indigenous Environmental Ethics in Africa. *Diogenes* 52: 3, 17-34.

Kidane, Sahlu. 2002. *Borana Folktales: A Conceptual Study.* London: HAAN Publishing.

King, Karen. 2003. *What is Gnosticism?* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Legesse, Asmarom. 1973. *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society.* New York: Free Press.

_____. 2001. *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System.* Trenton: NJ: Red Sea Press.

Locke, Alain. 1989. *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond.* Ed. L. Harris. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Megalommatis, Muhammed Shamsaddin. 2007. Meroitic/Oromo Ethiopian Continuity: Call for a Research. *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14:1 (March), 7-33.

Megerssa, Gemetchu. 2005. The Oromo World – View, *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12: 1&2, 68-79.

_____. 1995. *Booran.* New York: Rosen Publishing.

_____. 1993. Knowledge, Identity and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo of East and Northeast Africa. Revised Version of an Unpublished PhD Dissertation, London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies.

_____. 1987. "On Oromo View of Development." Interview Conducted with Dabassa Guyyo in September, transcribed and translated by Gemetchu Megerssa, November 1987.

O'Connor, David B. 1994. *Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.

Oruka, Henry, Odera. 1997. Part I: Essays by H. O. Oruka, in *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam*, Graness, Anke, and Kresse, Kai (eds.), 23-138. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Reader, John. 1998. *Africa: A Biography of the Continent.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Rhadakrishnan, Sarvepalli and Moore, Charles, trans. 1967. *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Roehrig, Catharine; Dreyfus, Renee; Keller, Cathline. 2005. *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh.* New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Rudolph, Kurt. 1983. *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism.* Trans. R. McL. Wilson. San Francisco, Calif.: Harper and Row.

Spinoza, Benedict. 2000/1667. *Ethics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Sumner, Claude. 1995. *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Collection and Analysis.* Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

_____. 1996a. *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Songs, Collection and Analysis.* Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

_____. 1996b. *Oromo Wisdom literature: Folktales, Collection and Analysis*. Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

Tablino, Paul. 2005. Mutual Interculturation: The Missionary Approach of   Lambert Bartels and   its Influence on Catholic missionaries in   Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia, *Journal Oromo Studies* 12: 1&2, July, 35-51.

Verharen, Charles C. 2006. Sage Philosophy, Rationality and Science: The Case of Ethiopia. *EJOSSAH: Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities* 4: 2, (July), 13-32.

_____. 2006. *Philosophy against Empire: An Ancient Egyptian Renaissance. Journal of Black Studies* 36: 6 (July), 958-973.

_____. 2003. Afrocentricity, Eurocentrism, and Ecofeminism: New Alliances for Socialism. *Socialism and Democracy*. Summer/Fall, 73-90.

_____. 1998. Environment, Culture, and Ethics: An African Concept of Evil. *Presence Africaine*, 158: 2, Second Semester, 47-62.

_____. 1997. 'The New World and the Dreams to which it May Give Rise': An African and American Response to Hegel's Challenge. *Journal of Black Studies,* 27: 4, March, 456-493.

Williams, Bruce B. 1986. *Excavations between Abu Simbel and Sudan: The A-Group Cemetery at Qustul.* Chicago: University Press of Chicago.

Zitelmann, Thomas. 2005. *Ayyaana* and the Possibility of a Sufi Legacy, *Journal of Oromo Studies 12*: 1&2, 80-99.

MORAL ECONOMY: AN ORIGINAL ECONOMIC FORM FOR THE AFRICAN CONDITION

TEODROS KIROS

MAAT was to ancient Egypt as Wisdom was to ancient Greece. Wisdom was to Plato's aristocratic regime as *Maat* was to Egypt's social and political life. The concept of *Maat* insinuated itself into every aspect of Classical Egypt. Pharaohs and the majestic slaves who erected the pyramids swore by *Maat*. Rich and poor, men and women, slaves and free citizens worshipped the magic of *Maat*. *Maat* was the moral organizer of everyday life. Every facet of life was framed by *Maat*.

Why did *Maat* have such a presence? What was its magical spell? I should now like to address these questions. The human self required an organizing moral principle. Life could not be lived without a moral frame, a frame that furnished the self with boundaries and limiting conditions of social action. This was lacking in Egypt until its gods originated the expansive concept of *Maat*. *Maat* was symbolized by the feminine principle of "truth, balance, order and justice." *Maat* was harmony, righteousness, patience and vision, born out of the feminine principle of patient labor. For the ancient Egyptians, the order of the universe was also the ideal order for the human world.

In this paper, I seek to theorize the relevance of *Maat*, a mythic concept, as a modern moral principle that can motivate both (a) organic leaders of the people, and (b) social movements themselves, to reorganize the public sphere in contemporary Africa, which is in serious crisis.

I

For the Greeks, the universe was ordered by Logos, by the rational word. It is this order that Plato used in his *Republic*, when he constructed an ideal city out of Logos. This principle was later translated into, "In the beginning was Logos," and the Logos was God (John 1, 1). Jesus himself was Logos; in marked contrast, for the ancient Egyptians, the organizing principle of logos was replaced by the organizing principle of *Maat*. The Egyptian city was ruled by Kings who personified *Maat*. The human heart, which was worshipped by the Egyptians, and which they considered the seat of thinking, was also the seat of *Maat*. The pharaohs were expected to rule with *Maat.* The Pharaoh's greatness was measured by the quality and quantity of the *Maat* which he/she internalized. After death, their hearts would be weighed by the scale of *Maat*, the scale of Justice.

When famines occurred and deep inequalities became a way of life, it was the duty of the rulers to uphold *Maat* and measure the depth and extent of the suffering. Not that this practice was perfectly upheld, particularly when nature overwhelmed the rulers' ideals, but there was at least an absolute and objective standard by which social/political life was judged and measured.

Maat requires an appropriate economic form, which has yet to be theorized. I would like to argue that the dominant capitalist economic form, no matter how elastic and flexible, and however generously it is stretched, is morally vacuous and hence unable to accommodate *Maat*.

A moral form requires a supportive economic form. Classical Egypt had the right moral form but not the right economic form. Whereas Maat singled out the self as capable of stepping out of its ego shell and embracing other egos outside itself, the corresponding famine and hunger situations forced the actual Egyptian, not to embrace the other, but to destroy other selves. It is these particular moments of despair and anguish that killed the enabling moments of patience, justice and love, *Maat's* feminized principles. The Egyptian self was thus denuded of its potential grandeur, which would make many Afrocentrists – intent on proving the moral superiority of the African self – cry in despair. The attempts by Egypt's leaders and people to internalize the limiting conditions of *Maat* prove the Afrocentric hypothesis that there was a particularly Egyptianized/Africanized effort at internalizing moral greatness, but it was not institutionalized in Egyptian life in the way that the capitalist form was in 17th century Europe and beyond.

The moral form of life that *Maat* promised remained on paper, as nothing more than an ideal. African thinkers did not take the trouble to embody this ideal in the lifeblood of institutions. In short, the moral form did not produce a corresponding economic form – in contrast to the capitalist economic form which did produce a corresponding moral form, and institutionalized the latter in far-reaching structures of state and civil society. That is the task that I should like to impose on myself.

The threat of inevitable doom has yet to be heeded, and capitalism itself continues to marvel at its resiliency in creating crises and immediately correcting them, thereby proving its "naturalness" and making it easy for its proponents to present it to the world as a God-chosen economic form. Any attempt to counter it with something like *Maat* is dismissed as a pipedream. No sane person is expected to take *Maat* seriously. And the fact that its geographical origin is an African civilization conveniently leads many to dismiss *Maat* as irrelevant and wishful thinking.

Maat as a moral form is considerably deeper than the passing moral sentiments that the Scottish moral philosopher proposed. Generosity, justice, uprightness, tolerance, wisdom and loving patience go directly against our natural proclivity to injustice, dishonesty, intolerance, closed mindedness, ignorance and hate. These vices, which have been used to build empires and economic forms that support the visions of the rich and

powerful, seem to fit the ready-to-hand tapestry of our makeup, which by now has become so second-nature that no *Maat* is going to disassemble it. In contemporary life, revitalizing the features of *Maat* requires nothing less than manufacturing a new human being.

II

We must create human beings who can act generously, patiently, tolerantly and lovingly. We do not have such human beings in sufficient numbers to construct an economic form that values justice, uprightness, wisdom, tolerance and loving patience. Taking the virtues singly, the following picture emerges. Let us begin with generosity. Generosity is a virtue. It means that one is willing to give without receiving, or is willing to give without the deliberate intent of receiving anything, or for which the receiving is only incidental. The generous person gives a particular good A to person B; and person B does not simply receive A as a matter of course. B receives A with a profound respect for the giver, and even plans, if she can, to one day reciprocate not in the same way, but in some way. The reciprocity need not be of equal goods (where equality is measured by money). What makes the act morally compelling is the desire to reciprocate, and not the quantity of the reciprocity. One of the central pillars of *Maat* as an economic form is the cultivation of a human self willing and able to act generously in the relational moral regime of giving and receiving, or simply giving without receiving, or receiving with a profound sense of gratitude and respect.

Justice is one of the features of *Maat* and it is also a potential source of a Moral Economy, appropriate for the African condition. As Aristotle taught, one does not become just merely by abstractly knowing what Justice is; rather, one becomes just by doing just things. The puzzling question is this: if one does not know what justice is, then how can one know what just things are, so that one could choose only just things and not others? The question is not easy to answer. But an example might give us a sense of what Aristotle means.

It is Christmas evening and a family is gathering for a dinner and the table is set for ten people. Among the popular dishes are five pies, and shortly before the guests arrive, one of the family members has been asked to cut the pies into exact sizes, such that no single person would feel that he has mistakenly picked one of the smallest pies. The task of the pie cutter was to observe that justice is served and that all the pies are cut evenly and fairly. What must this person do? That is the moral question. Well, at the minimum the person must be just in order to perform just action, and in this instance, justice means nothing more than cutting the pieces equally to the best of one's ability. The pies must be cut with moral imagination and with intuitive mathematical precision. There is a spiritual dimension to the science of measurement, which could have been simply done with a measuring rope. That possibility, however convenient, is not elegant.

Rather, the expectations are that (1) the person is going to make an effort to be precise, because her intention is to be just, and (2) that her eyes are just, or that she prays that they would be. (1) and (2) are the requirements; the rest is left to moral imagination.

She cuts the pies, and it turns out that all the pieces appear to be equal, and when the guests arrive, they randomly pick the pieces, and appear to be satisfied. What we have here is a display of justice in the Aristotelian sense, in which justice is defined as an activity that is guided by a measure of equality, and equality itself is manifest in the attempt at being fair to everyone – in this case, an attempt to be fair to the guests, without their ever knowing that they are being worked on. They judge the event as illuminated by justice, and as uplifting.

Generalizing to a higher level, what we can say is that any economic form must be guided with justice and that all the commodities that human beings should want must be distributed with such a standard, the standard of justice as fairness. Given justice as fairness, commodity A can be distributed between persons B and C, in such an equitable way that B and C share commodity A by getting the same amount at any time, any place and for a good reason.

III

Compassion is another feature of *Maat*; indeed, it is one of the cardinal moral forms for the new moral economy that I am theorizing here. Compassion is to moral economy as greed is to capitalism. One cannot imagine capitalism without the salient principle of greed, and similarly, one cannot imagine moral economy without the original principle of compassion. The modern world, being what it is, is divided by class, race, gender, ethnicity and groups. Out of these divisions, it is class division which is the most decisive, as it is also the one that seems to be so natural that we cannot surmount the pain and agony that it produces. In a class-divided world, compassion is the least present, since there is no compelling reason for individuals to be compassionate if they are not naturally so, or so inclined. In such cases, though, compassion could be learned, either by example or directly through teaching.

An example may elucidate the place of compassion in moral economy. It is summer, and exhaustingly hot. People that you encounter are hot-tempered too. Everybody is on the edge, including you. You happen to be a coffee-lover, so there you are standing behind a long line of people to get your fix. The heat has made you impatient, and you are ready to explode on anything around you. You are naturally generous, but not this day. Shortly before you leave the coffee shop, a homeless person smiles at you and tries to talk to you, hoping that you will understand the purpose of the conversation. Of course you understand, but you ignore him and walk by. But then something bothers you, and you came back to the coffee shop and generously give the man what he wanted. You are proud of yourself,

because you have done what generosity demands, that you control your temper and perform the morally correct action. Surely, you say to yourself, it was not easy, but you did it.

Now you wonder what all this means, and why you did it. The answer is obvious. Indeed, it is because you are really a compassionate human being. You had no obligation to pay attention to that person. He is not related to you, he is not an ex-friend that fortune turned against, nor did you do it so as to be a media-hero. Your action is morally worthy only because you have internalized compassion. To you compassion comes quite naturally. It is part of your moral frame. Any repeated action becomes a habit. So compassionate action comes habitually to you. You rarely fight it. Rather, you exuberantly let it lead your way, as it eventually did on that hot and difficult day. But even on that day you conquered the temptation of doubt, and excessive self-love, by the moral force of compassion. That is why you corrected yourself when you were briefly but powerfully tempted by forgetfulness, and returned to do the morally right thing.

Compassion is morally compelling when it is extended to a total other, who has nothing to do with our lives, beyond awaiting our moral attention. It is much easier to be compassionate towards a loved one, a friend, a relative and even an acquaintance; harder is the task when the subject is a real other, such as that person by the coffee shop. In order for any action to be morally worthy, the motive must be pure, and the purity is measured by the quality and quantity of the compassion that is extended to any needy human being, uncontaminated by external motives, such as love, friendship, acquaintance and relation. It is in this particular way that I am arguing that compassion serves *Maat*.

IV

Tolerance is another crucial feature of Moral Economy. In fact, it could easily be argued that it is an indispensable organizing principle, which works in tandem with loving kindness. Just as we cannot love a person – except illusorily – without respecting her, so we cannot live with one another without tolerating each other's needs, habits, likes and dislikes. In the economic sphere tolerance is subtly pertinent. We cannot readily sense its inner working unless we pay attention to its musings at the workplace, as we interact with one another as managers and workers.

Consider the following example to underscore the point. There is this worker who does things in ways that many people find annoying. She customarily comes late to work; she procrastinates; she spreads papers, cans and food stuffs all around her; sometimes she cannot even find herself amidst the dirt, the pile and the dust. Yet, and this is the point, whatever tasks she performs are carried out as flawlessly as is humanly possible. Her supervisor has agonized over what to do with her and has often contemplated firing her. Mollified by the elegance of her work and his loving-kindness towards her, he decides to keep her. He has promised

himself to erase those occasional thoughts of getting rid of her. As he told one of his friends, he has learned – not very easily – the ways of tolerance as a principle of management, as an approach to dealing with workers who will not and cannot change their habits.

I consider this manager very wise and skilled at the art of management. He decided that it was better to change himself, as hard as it was, than to expect the worker to change. The structure of his thoughts could be put syllogistically:

Y can change his way;
X cannot change easily;
Therefore Y must change for the sake of Z.

Y is the manager. X is the worker. Z is the organization where Y and X work. In this situation X was saved precisely because the manager internalized tolerance and loving-kindness as the organizing principles of the organization. Y controlled his ego and chose to advance the interests of Z over and against his own private needs. He did not fire X, nor did he insist that X must change. He must have intuitively and empirically concluded that it is pointless to expect X to change, nor would it benefit Z to lose X, since X is an intelligent and skilled worker.

Where tolerance is habitually practiced at workplaces, it becomes an indispensable good that can save many enterprises the unnecessary cost arising from hiring and firing workers – including the distress of their families and loved ones. Tolerance can easily remedy the situation. If it is easier for managers than for excellent workers to change, then it is the managers who must do so for the sake of a functional and democratic moral economy.

V

The Egyptians held the human heart at a level beyond any other organ, and this decision is not an accident. They revered the heart and mummified it, whereas the brain was sucked out at death. While modern medicine treats the brain as the cognitive organ that originates and processes thoughts, the Egyptians treated the human heart as the seat of thinking. To the Egyptians the human heart had both a physical and a transcendental function. Its physical function is pumping blood, and its transcendental function is moral thought. *Maat* was guided by the human heart. The heart is the home of thought impulses, or what we loosely call feelings.

The Egyptians accorded weight to the heart's transcendental function. They reasoned that thoughts originate in the heart, are processed by the brain, and are emitted as language. Some thoughts are expressed as speech and others are buried in the depth of the unconscious, beyond language, the realm of the expressible. It is the Egyptian insight about the heart as the seat

of thinking – particularly moral thinking – that gives the heart a central place in moral economy.

The citizens of the new moral economy must be encouraged to practice what they intuitively know: that moral thinking is both thinking outside of the self and the attempt at reaching the unknown and perhaps unknowable other. This difficult task of embracing another person's concerns as your very own is precisely the territory that the human heart undertakes. The brain indeed processes those thoughts, moral and otherwise, which originate in that regime of transcendental thought, but the depth of the need to embrace the other, to think for the other and with the other, are practices in moral thinking that we feel deeply in our hearts, and the will propels us toward action, and the brain organizes the sequences of what must be done.

The new moral economy must make the heart the initiator of action, and citizens must be encouraged to take the language of the heart, namely feeling, much more seriously. Where these intuitively felt and lived thoughts are temporarily absent from our busy lives, they must be made present by being remembered and recollected as the citizens' habits, on the basis of systematic education at schools, *madrasas*, churches and other institution of modern society.

The new moral economy desperately needs thoughtful human beings. A functioning moral economy not only needs leaders who follow the ways of *Maat;* more importantly, it needs citizens who practice what they feel in their hearts, or who at the minimum know intuitively that that is what they must do, if they are to preserve the human species. *Maat* shows us the way, and the human heart demonstrates the value of the practice.

Of course, what is difficult is the institutionalization of *Maat* as a regulatory ideal that could reform individual behavior. Social movements are composed of individuals who can be guided by moral ideals such as *Maat*. The same social movements, however, also require institutional conditions, which can facilitate individual behavior. The challenge is to use *Maat* both as a moral regulator and as the generator of institutions willing and able to encourage social movements seeking to change dysfunctional moral principles – such as the principles of the capitalist state that does not embrace *Maat* as its moral ideal.

REFERENCES

Collier, Mark, and Bill Manley. 2003. *How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, revised ed. Berkley: University of California Press.

Faulkner, Raymond trans. 1994. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Karenga, Maulana. 2004. *Maat, the Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt: A Study of Classical African Ethics*. New York: Routledge. This work is the leading historical text on Egyptian ethics, and I am taking its claim urther and seeking to theorize it as a principle for modern ethics,

capable of resolving the moral crisis of the contemporary African state.

MAAT News. (Legrand H. Clegg II, Editor and Publisher). Volume I, Edition I, December 1996.

Mancini Anna. 2004. *Ma'at Revealed: Philosophy of Justice in Ancient Egypt*. New York: Buenos Books of America.

CONTRIBUTORS

Bekele Gutema, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Charles C. Verharen, Professor of Philosophy, Howard University, Washington, D.C., USA

Daniel Smith (†), Associate Professor of Philosophy at Addis Ababa University until his untimely death in January 2012

Ezkiel Gebissa, Associate Professor of History, Kettering University, Flint, Michigan, USA

Gail M. Presbey, Professor of Philosophy, University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Messay Kebede, Professor of Philosophy, University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio, USA

Taddesse Berisso, Associate Professor of Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Taddesse Lencho, Lecturer, Faculty of Law, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tenna Dewo, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Teodros Kiros, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Department of Liberal Arts, Berklee College of Music, Boston, USA

INDEX

THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH
IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

PROJECTS

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life.* Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues*. This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. *Joint-Colloquia* with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

4. *Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development.* A study in values and education which unites philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and scholars in education in the elaboration of ways of enriching the moral content of education and character development. This work has been underway since 1980.

The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Colombia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

PUBLICATIONS ON CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGE

Series I. Culture and Values
Series II. African Philosophical Studies
Series IIA. Islamic Philosophical Studies
Series III. Asian Philosophical Studies
Series IV. Western European Philosophical Studies
Series IVA. Central and Eastern European Philosophical Studies
Series V. Latin American Philosophical Studies
Series VI. Foundations of Moral Education
Series VII. Seminars: Culture and Values
Series VIII. Christian Philosophical Studies

****

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGE

Series I. Culture and Values

I.1 *Research on Culture and Values: Intersection of Universities, Churches and Nations*. George F. McLean, ed. ISBN 0819173533 (paper); 081917352-5 (cloth).
I.2 *The Knowledge of Values: A Methodological Introduction to the Study of Values;* A. Lopez Quintas, ed. ISBN 081917419x (paper); 0819174181 (cloth).

I.3 *Reading Philosophy for the XXIst Century*. George F. McLean, ed. ISBN 0819174157 (paper); 0819174149 (cloth).

I.4 *Relations Between Cultures*. John A. Kromkowski, ed. ISBN 1565180089 (paper); 1565180097 (cloth).

I.5 *Urbanization and Values*. John A. Kromkowski, ed. ISBN 1565180100 (paper); 1565180119 (cloth).

I.6 *The Place of the Person in Social Life*. Paul Peachey and John A. Kromkowski, eds. ISBN 1565180127 (paper); 156518013-5 (cloth).

I.7 *Abrahamic Faiths, Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts*. Paul Peachey, George F. McLean and John A. Kromkowski, eds. ISBN 1565181042 (paper).

I.8 *Ancient Western Philosophy: The Hellenic Emergence*. George F. McLean and Patrick J. Aspell, eds. ISBN 156518100X (paper).

I.9 *Medieval Western Philosophy: The European Emergence*. Patrick J. Aspell, ed. ISBN 1565180941 (paper).

I.10 *The Ethical Implications of Unity and the Divine in Nicholas of Cusa*. David L. De Leonardis. ISBN 1565181123 (paper).

I.11 *Ethics at the Crossroads: 1.Normative Ethics and Objective Reason*. George F. McLean, ed. ISBN 1565180224 (paper).

I.12 *Ethics at the Crossroads: 2.Personalist Ethics and Human Subjectivity*. George F. McLean, ed. ISBN 1565180240 (paper).

I.13 *The Emancipative Theory of Jürgen Habermas and Metaphysics*. Robert Badillo. ISBN 1565180429 (paper); 1565180437 (cloth).

I.14 *The Deficient Cause of Moral Evil According to Thomas Aquinas*. Edward Cook. ISBN 1565180704 (paper).

I.15 *Human Love: Its Meaning and Scope, a Phenomenology of Gift and Encounter*. Alfonso Lopez Quintas. ISBN 1565180747 (paper).

I.16 *Civil Society and Social Reconstruction*. George F. McLean, ed. ISBN 1565180860 (paper).

I.17 *Ways to God, Personal and Social at the Turn of Millennia: The Iqbal Lecture, Lahore*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181239 (paper).

I.18 *The Role of the Sublime in Kant's Moral Metaphysics*. John R. Goodreau. ISBN 1565181247 (paper).

I.19 *Philosophical Challenges and Opportunities of Globalization*. Oliva Blanchette, Tomonobu Imamichi and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565181298 (paper).

I.20 *Faith, Reason and Philosophy: Lectures at The al-Azhar, Qom, Tehran, Lahore and Beijing; Appendix: The Encyclical Letter: Fides et Ratio*. George F. McLean. ISBN 156518130 (paper).

I.21 *Religion and the Relation between Civilizations: Lectures on Cooperation between Islamic and Christian Cultures in a Global Horizon*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181522 (paper).

I.22 *Freedom, Cultural Traditions and Progress: Philosophy in Civil Society and Nation Building, Tashkent Lectures, 1999*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181514 (paper).

I.23 *Ecology of Knowledge*. Jerzy A. Wojciechowski. ISBN 1565181581 (paper).

I.24 *God and the Challenge of Evil: A Critical Examination of Some Serious Objections to the Good and Omnipotent God*. John L. Yardan. ISBN 1565181603 (paper).

I.25 *Reason, Rationality and Reasonableness, Vietnamese Philosophical Studies, I*. Tran Van Doan. ISBN 1565181662 (paper).

I.26 *The Culture of Citizenship: Inventing Postmodern Civic Culture*. Thomas Bridges. ISBN 1565181689 (paper).

I.27 *The Historicity of Understanding and the Problem of Relativism in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Osman Bilen. ISBN 1565181670 (paper).

I.28 *Speaking of God*. Carlo Huber. ISBN 1565181697 (paper).

I.29 *Persons, Peoples and Cultures in a Global Age: Metaphysical Bases for Peace between Civilizations*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181875 (paper).

I.30 *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change: Lectures In Chennai/Madras, India*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181883 (paper).

I.31 *Husserl and Stein*. Richard Feist and William Sweet, eds. ISBN 1565181948 (paper).

I.32 *Paul Hanly Furfey's Quest for a Good Society*. Bronislaw Misztal, Francesco Villa, and Eric Sean Williams, eds. ISBN 1565182278 (paper).

I.33 *Three Theories of Society*. Paul Hanly Furfey. ISBN 9781565182288 (paper).

I.34 *Building Peace in Civil Society: An Autobiographical Report from a Believers' Church*. Paul Peachey. ISBN 9781565182325 (paper).

I.35 *Karol Wojtyla's Philosophical Legacy*. Agnes B. Curry, Nancy Mardas and George F. McLean ,eds. ISBN 9781565182479 (paper).

I.36 *Kantian Form and Phenomenological Force: Kant's Imperatives and the Directives of Contemporary Phenomenology*. Randolph C. Wheeler. ISBN 9781565182547 (paper).

I.37 *Beyond Modernity: The Recovery of Person and Community in Global Times: Lectures in China and Vietnam*. George F. McLean. ISBN 9781565182578 (paper)

I. 38 *Religion and Culture*. George F. McLean. ISBN 9781565182561 (paper).

I.39 *The Dialogue of Cultural Traditions: Global Perspective*. William Sweet, George F. McLean, Tomonobu Imamichi, Safak Ural, O. Faruk Akyol, eds. ISBN 9781565182585 (paper).

I.40 *Unity and Harmony, Love and Compassion in Global Times*. George F. McLean. ISBN 978-1565182592 (paper).

I.41 *Intercultural Dialogue and Human Rights. Luigi Bonanate, Roberto Papini* and *William Sweet*, eds. ISBN 9781565182714 (paper).

Series II. African Philosophical Studies

II.1 *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies: I.* Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, eds. ISBN 1565180046 (paper); 1565180054 (cloth).

II.2 *The Foundations of Social Life: Ugandan Philosophical Studies: I.* A.T. Dalfovo, ed. ISBN 1565180062 (paper); 156518007-0 (cloth).

II.3 *Identity and Change in Nigeria: Nigerian Philosophical Studies, I.* Theophilus Okere, ed. ISBN 1565180682 (paper).

II.4 *Social Reconstruction in Africa: Ugandan Philosophical studies, II*. E. Wamala, A.R. Byaruhanga, A.T. Dalfovo, J.K.Kigongo, S.A.Mwanahewa and G.Tusabe, eds. ISBN 1565181182 (paper).

II.5 *Ghana: Changing Values/Changing Technologies: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, II.* Helen Lauer, ed. ISBN 1565181441 (paper).

II.6 *Sameness and Difference: Problems and Potentials in South African Civil Society: South African Philosophical Studies, I*. James R.Cochrane and Bastienne Klein, eds. ISBN 1565181557 (paper).

II.7 *Protest and Engagement: Philosophy after Apartheid at an Historically Black South African University: South African Philosophical Studies, II.* Patrick Giddy, ed. ISBN 1565181638 (paper).

II.8 *Ethics, Human Rights and Development in Africa: Ugandan Philosophical Studies, III.* A.T. Dalfovo, J.K. Kigongo, J. Kisekka, G. Tusabe, E. Wamala, R. Munyonyo, A.B. Rukooko, A.B.T. Byaruhanga-akiiki, and M. Mawa, eds. ISBN 1565181727 (paper).

II.9 *Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, III.* Kwame Gyekye ISBN 156518193X (paper).

II.10 *Social and Religious Concerns of East African: A Wajibu Anthology*: *Kenyan Philosophical Studies, I.* Gerald J. Wanjohi and G. Wakuraya Wanjohi, eds. ISBN 1565182219 (paper).

II.11 *The Idea of an African University: The Nigerian Experience: Nigerian Philosophical Studies, II*. Joseph Kenny, ed. ISBN 978-1565182301 (paper).

II.12 *The Struggles after the Struggle: Zimbabwean Philosophical Study, I.* David Kaulemu, ed. ISBN 9781565182318 (paper).

II.13 *Indigenous and Modern Environmental Ethics: A Study of the Indigenous Oromo Environmental Ethic and Modern Issues of Environment and Development: Ethiopian Philosophical Studies, I.* Workineh Kelbessa. ISBN 9781565182530 (paper).

II.14 *African Philosophy and the Future of Africa: South African Philosophical Studies, III.* Gerard Walmsley, ed. ISMB 9781565182707 (paper).

II.15 *Philosophy in Ethiopia: African Philosophy Today, I: Ethiopian Philosophical Studies, II*. Bekele Gutema and Charles C. Verharen, eds. ISBN 9781565182790 (paper).

II.16 *The Idea of a Nigerian University: A Revisited: Nigerian Philosophical Studies, III*. Olatunji Oyeshile and Joseph Kenny, eds. ISBN 9781565182776 (paper).

Series IIA. Islamic Philosophical Studies

IIA.1 *Islam and the Political Order*. Muhammad Saïd al-Ashmawy. ISBN ISBN 156518047X (paper); 156518046-1 (cloth).

IIA.2 *Al-Ghazali Deliverance from Error and Mystical Union with the Almighty: Al-munqidh Min al-Dadāl*. Critical Arabic edition and English translation by Muhammad Abulaylah and Nurshif Abdul-Rahim Rifat; Introduction and notes by George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181530 (Arabic-English edition, paper), ISBN 1565180828 (Arabic edition, paper), ISBN 156518081X (English edition, paper)

IIA.3 *Philosophy in Pakistan*. Naeem Ahmad, ed. ISBN 1565181085 (paper).

IIA.4 *The Authenticity of the Text in Hermeneutics*. Seyed Musa Dibadj. ISBN 1565181174 (paper).

IIA.5 *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of the Author: H.-G.Gadamer vs E.D.Hirsch*. Burhanettin Tatar. ISBN 156518121 (paper).

IIA.6 *Ways to God, Personal and Social at the Turn of Millennia: The Iqbal Lectures, Lahore*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181239 (paper).

IIA.7 *Faith, Reason and Philosophy: Lectures at Al-Azhar University, Qom, Tehran, Lahore and Beijing; Appendix: The Encyclical Letter: Fides et Ratio*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181301 (paper).

IIA.8 *Islamic and Christian Cultures: Conflict or Dialogue: Bulgarian Philosophical Studies, III*. Plament Makariev, ed. ISBN 156518162X (paper).

IIA.9 *Values of Islamic Culture and the Experience of History, Russian Philosophical Studies, I*. Nur Kirabaev, Yuriy Pochta, eds. ISBN 1565181336 (paper).

IIA.10 *Christian-Islamic Preambles of Faith*. Joseph Kenny. ISBN 1565181387 (paper).

IIA.11 *The Historicity of Understanding and the Problem of Relativism in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Osman Bilen. ISBN 1565181670 (paper).

IIA.12 *Religion and the Relation between Civilizations: Lectures on Cooperation between Islamic and Christian Cultures in a Global Horizon*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181522 (paper).

IIA.13 *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council*. Mahmut Aydin. ISBN 1565181719 (paper).

IIA.14 *Philosophy of the Muslim World; Authors and Principal Themes*. Joseph Kenny. ISBN 1565181794 (paper).

IIA.15 *Islam and Its Quest for Peace: Jihad, Justice and Education.* Mustafa Köylü. ISBN 1565181808 (paper).

IIA.16 *Islamic Thought on the Existence of God: Contributions and Contrasts with Contemporary Western Philosophy of Religion.* Cafer S. Yaran. ISBN 1565181921 (paper).

IIA.17 *Hermeneutics, Faith, and Relations between Cultures: Lectures in Qom, Iran.* George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181913 (paper).

IIA.18 *Change and Essence: Dialectical Relations between Change and Continuity in the Turkish Intellectual Tradition.* Sinasi Gunduz and Cafer S. Yaran, eds. ISBN 1565182227 (paper).

IIA. 19 *Understanding Other Religions: Al-Biruni and Gadamer's "Fusion of Horizons".* Kemal Ataman. ISBN 9781565182523 (paper).

Series III. Asian Philosophical Studies

III.1 *Man and Nature: Chinese Philosophical Studies, I.* Tang Yi-jie, Li Zhen, eds. ISBN 0819174130 (paper); 0819174122 (cloth).

III.2 *Chinese Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Chinese Philosophical Studies, II.* Tran van Doan, ed. ISBN 1565180321 (paper); 156518033X (cloth).

III.3 *Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Chinese Culture: Chinese Philosophical Studies, III.* Tang Yijie. ISBN 1565180348 (paper); 156518035-6 (cloth).

III.4 *Morality, Metaphysics and Chinese Culture (Metaphysics, Culture and Morality, I).* Vincent Shen and Tran van Doan, eds. ISBN 1565180275 (paper); 156518026-7 (cloth).

III.5 *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence.* George F. McLean. ISBN 1565180313 (paper); 156518030-5 (cloth).

III.6 *Psychology, Phenomenology and Chinese Philosophy: Chinese Philosophical Studies, VI.* Vincent Shen, Richard Knowles and Tran Van Doan, eds. ISBN 1565180453 (paper); 1565180445 (cloth).

III.7 *Values in Philippine Culture and Education: Philippine Philosophical Studies, I.* Manuel B. Dy, Jr., ed. ISBN 1565180412 (paper); 156518040-2 (cloth).

III.7A *The Human Person and Society: Chinese Philosophical Studies, VIIA.* Zhu Dasheng, Jin Xiping and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565180887.

III.8 *The Filipino Mind: Philippine Philosophical Studies II.* Leonardo N. Mercado. ISBN 156518064X (paper); 156518063-1 (cloth).

III.9 *Philosophy of Science and Education: Chinese Philosophical Studies IX.* Vincent Shen and Tran Van Doan, eds. ISBN 1565180763 (paper); 156518075-5 (cloth).

III.10 *Chinese Cultural Traditions and Modernization: Chinese Philosophical Studies, X.* Wang Miaoyang, Yu Xuanmeng and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565180682 (paper).

III.11 *The Humanization of Technology and Chinese Culture: Chinese Philosophical Studies XI*. Tomonobu Imamichi, Wang Miaoyang and Liu Fangtong, eds. ISBN 1565181166 (paper).

III.12 *Beyond Modernization: Chinese Roots of Global Awareness: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XII*. Wang Miaoyang, Yu Xuanmeng and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565180909 (paper).

III.13 *Philosophy and Modernization in China: Chinese Philosophical Studies XIII*. Liu Fangtong, Huang Songjie and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565180666 (paper).

III.14 *Economic Ethics and Chinese Culture: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XIV*. Yu Xuanmeng, Lu Xiaohe, Liu Fangtong, Zhang Rulun and Georges Enderle, eds. ISBN 1565180925 (paper).

III.15 *Civil Society in a Chinese Context: Chinese Philosophical Studies XV*. Wang Miaoyang, Yu Xuanmeng and Manuel B. Dy, eds. ISBN 1565180844 (paper).

III.16 *The Bases of Values in a Time of Change: Chinese and Western: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XVI*. Kirti Bunchua, Liu Fangtong, Yu Xuanmeng, Yu Wujin, eds. ISBN l56518114X (paper).

III.17 *Dialogue between Christian Philosophy and Chinese Culture: Philosophical Perspectives for the Third Millennium: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XVII*. Paschal Ting, Marian Kao and Bernard Li, eds. ISBN 1565181735 (paper).

III.18 *The Poverty of Ideological Education: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XVIII*. Tran Van Doan. ISBN 1565181646 (paper).

III.19 *God and the Discovery of Man: Classical and Contemporary Approaches: Lectures in Wuhan, China*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181891 (paper).

III.20 *Cultural Impact on International Relations: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XX*. Yu Xintian, ed. ISBN 156518176X (paper).

III.21 *Cultural Factors in International Relations: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXI*. Yu Xintian, ed. ISBN 1565182049 (paper).

III.22 *Wisdom in China and the West*: *Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXII*. Vincent Shen and Willard Oxtoby †. ISBN 1565182057 (paper)

III.23 *China's Contemporary Philosophical Journey: Western Philosophy and Marxism: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXIII*. Liu Fangtong. ISBN 1565182065 (paper).

III.24 *Shanghai: Its Urbanization and Culture: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXIV*. Yu Xuanmeng and He Xirong, eds. ISBN 1565182073 (paper).

III.25 *Dialogue of Philosophies, Religions and Civilizations in the Era of Globalization: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXV*. Zhao Dunhua, ed. ISBN 9781565182431 (paper).

III.26 *Rethinking Marx: Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXVI*. Zou Shipeng and Yang Xuegong, eds. ISBN 9781565182448 (paper).

III.27 *Confucian Ethics in Retrospect and Prospect: Chinese Philosophical Studies XXVII*. Vincent Shen and Kwong-loi Shun, eds. ISBN 9781565182455 (paper).

III.28 *Cultural Tradition and Social Progress, Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXVIII*. He Xirong, Yu Xuanmeng, Yu Xintian, Yu Wujing, Yang Junyi, eds. ISBN 9781565182660 (Paper).

IIIB.1 *Authentic Human Destiny: The Paths of Shankara and Heidegger: Indian Philosophical Studies, I*. Vensus A. George. ISBN 1565181190 (paper).

IIIB.2 *The Experience of Being as Goal of Human Existence: The Heideggerian Approach: Indian Philosophical Studies, II*. Vensus A. George. ISBN 156518145X (paper).

IIIB.3 *Religious Dialogue as Hermeneutics: Bede Griffiths's Advaitic Approach: Indian Philosophical Studies, III*. Kuruvilla Pandikattu. ISBN 1565181395 (paper).

IIIB.4 *Self-Realization [Brahmaanubhava]: The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara: Indian Philosophical Studies, IV*. Vensus A. George. ISBN 1565181549 (paper).

IIIB.5 *Gandhi: The Meaning of Mahatma for the Millennium: Indian Philosophical Studies, V*. Kuruvilla Pandikattu, ed. ISBN 1565181565 (paper).

IIIB.6 *Civil Society in Indian Cultures: Indian Philosophical Studies, VI*. Asha Mukherjee, Sabujkali Sen (Mitra) and K. Bagchi, eds. ISBN 1565181573 (paper).

IIIB.7 *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change: Lectures in Chennai/Madras, India*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181883 (paper).

IIIB.8 *Plenitude and Participation: The Life of God in Man: Lectures in Chennai/Madras, India*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181999 (paper).

IIIB.9 *Sufism and Bhakti, a Comparative Study: Indian Philosophical Studies, VII*. Md. Sirajul Islam. ISBN 1565181980 (paper).

IIIB.10 *Reasons for Hope: Its Nature, Role and Future*: *Indian Philosophical Studies, VIII*. Kuruvilla Pandikattu, ed. ISBN 156518 2162 (paper).

IIIB.11 *Lifeworlds and Ethics: Studies in Several Keys*: *Indian Philosophical Studies, IX*. Margaret Chatterjee. ISBN 9781565182332 (paper).

IIIB.12 *Paths to the Divine: Ancient and Indian*: *Indian Philosophical Studies, X*. Vensus A. George. ISBN 9781565182486. (paper).

IIB.13 *Faith, Reason, Science: Philosophical Reflections with Special Reference to Fides et Ratio*: *Indian Philosophical Studies, XIII*. Varghese Manimala, ed. IBSN 9781565182554 (paper).

IIIB.14 *Identity, Creativity and Modernization: Perspectives on Indian Cultural Tradition: Indian Philosophical Studies, XIV*. *Sebastian*

Velassery and Vensus A. George, eds. ISBN 9781565182783 (paper).

IIIC.1 *Spiritual Values and Social Progress: Uzbekistan Philosophical Studies, I*. Said Shermukhamedov and Victoriya Levinskaya, eds. ISBN 1565181433 (paper).

IIIC.2 *Kazakhstan: Cultural Inheritance and Social Transformation: Kazakh Philosophical Studies, I*. Abdumalik Nysanbayev. ISBN 1565182022 (paper).

IIIC.3 *Social Memory and Contemporaneity: Kyrgyz Philosophical Studies, I*. Gulnara A. Bakieva. ISBN 9781565182349 (paper).

IIID.1 *Reason, Rationality and Reasonableness: Vietnamese Philosophical Studies, I*. Tran Van Doan. ISBN 1565181662 (paper).

IIID.2 *Hermeneutics for a Global Age: Lectures in Shanghai and Hanoi*. George F. McLean. ISBN 1565181905 (paper).

IIID.3 *Cultural Traditions and Contemporary Challenges in Southeast Asia*. Warayuth Sriwarakuel, Manuel B.Dy, J.Haryatmoko, Nguyen Trong Chuan, and Chhay Yiheang, eds. ISBN 1565182138 (paper).

IIID.4 *Filipino Cultural Traits: Claro R.Ceniza Lectures*. Rolando M. Gripaldo, ed. ISBN 1565182251 (paper).

IIID.5 *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*. Chief editor: Nguyen Tai Thu; Authors: Dinh Minh Chi, Ly Kim Hoa, Ha thuc Minh, Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Tai Thu. ISBN 1565180984 (paper).

IIID.6 *Relations between Religions and Cultures in Southeast Asia*. Gadis Arivia and Donny Gahral Adian, eds. ISBN 9781565182509 (paper).

Series IV. Western European Philosophical Studies

IV.1 *Italy in Transition: The Long Road from the First to the Second Republic: The Edmund D. Pellegrino Lectures*. Paolo Janni, ed. ISBN 1565181204 (paper).

IV.2 *Italy and the European Monetary Union: The Edmund D. Pellegrino Lectures*. Paolo Janni, ed. ISBN 156518128X (paper).

IV.3 *Italy at the Millennium: Economy, Politics, Literature and Journalism: The Edmund D. Pellegrino Lectures*. Paolo Janni, ed. ISBN 1565181581 (paper).

IV.4 *Speaking of God*. Carlo Huber. ISBN 1565181697 (paper).

IV.5 *The Essence of Italian Culture and the Challenge of a Global Age*. Paulo Janni and George F. McLean, eds. ISBB 1565181778 (paper).

IV.6 *Italic Identity in Pluralistic Contexts: Toward the Development of Intercultural Competencies*. Piero Bassetti and Paolo Janni, eds. ISBN 1565181441 (paper).

Series IVA. Central and Eastern European Philosophical Studies

IVA.1 *The Philosophy of Person: Solidarity and Cultural Creativity: Polish Philosophical Studies, I.* A. Tischner, J.M. Zycinski, eds. ISBN 1565180496 (paper); 156518048-8 (cloth).

IVA.2 *Public and Private Social Inventions in Modern Societies: Polish Philosophical Studies, II.* L. Dyczewski, P. Peachey, J.A. Kromkowski, eds. ISBN. 1565180518 (paper); 156518050X (cloth).

IVA.3 *Traditions and Present Problems of Czech Political Culture: Czechoslovak Philosophical Studies, I.* M. Bednár and M. Vejraka, eds. ISBN 1565180577 (paper); 156518056-9 (cloth).

IVA.4 *Czech Philosophy in the XXth Century: Czech Philosophical Studies, II.* Lubomír Nový and Jirí Gabriel, eds. ISBN 1565180291 (paper); 156518028-3 (cloth).

IVA.5 *Language, Values and the Slovak Nation: Slovak Philosophical Studies, I.* Tibor Pichler and Jana Gašparí-ková, eds. ISBN 1565180372 (paper); 156518036-4 (cloth).

IVA.6 *Morality and Public Life in a Time of Change: Bulgarian Philosophical Studies, I.* V. Prodanov and A. Davidov, eds. ISBN 1565180550 (paper); 1565180542 (cloth).

IVA.7 *Knowledge and Morality: Georgian Philosophical Studies, 1.* N.V. Chavchavadze, G. Nodia and P. Peachey, eds. ISBN 1565180534 (paper); 1565180526 (cloth).

IVA.8 *Cultural Heritage and Social Change: Lithuanian Philosophical Studies, I.* Bronius Kuzmickas and Aleksandr Dobrynin, eds. ISBN 1565180399 (paper); 1565180380 (cloth).

IVA.9 *National, Cultural and Ethnic Identities: Harmony beyond Conflict: Czech Philosophical Studies, IV.* Jaroslav Hroch, David Hollan, George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565181131 (paper).

IVA.10 *Models of Identities in Postcommunist Societies: Yugoslav Philosophical Studies, I.* Zagorka Golubovic and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565181211 (paper).

IVA.11 *Interests and Values: The Spirit of Venture in a Time of Change: Slovak Philosophical Studies, II.* Tibor Pichler and Jana Gasparikova, eds. ISBN 1565181255 (paper).

IVA.12 *Creating Democratic Societies: Values and Norms: Bulgarian Philosophical Studies, II.* Plamen Makariev, Andrew M. Blasko and Asen Davidov, eds. ISBN 156518131X (paper).

IVA.13 *Values of Islamic Culture and the Experience of History: Russian Philosophical Studies, I.* Nur Kirabaev and Yuriy Pochta, eds. ISBN 1565181336 (paper).

IVA.14 *Values and Education in Romania Today: Romanian Philosophical Studies, I.* Marin Calin and Magdalena Dumitrana, eds. ISBN 1565181344 (paper).

IVA.15 *Between Words and Reality, Studies on the Politics of Recognition and the Changes of Regime in Contemporary Romania: Romanian*

Philosophical Studies, II. Victor Neumann. ISBN 1565181611 (paper).

IVA.16 *Culture and Freedom: Romanian Philosophical Studies, III*. Marin Aiftinca, ed. ISBN 1565181360 (paper).

IVA.17 *Lithuanian Philosophy: Persons and Ideas: Lithuanian Philosophical Studies, II*. Jurate Baranova, ed. ISBN 1565181379 (paper).

IVA.18 *Human Dignity: Values and Justice: Czech Philosophical Studies, III*. Miloslav Bednar, ed. ISBN 1565181409 (paper).

IVA.19 *Values in the Polish Cultural Tradition: Polish Philosophical Studies, III*. Leon Dyczewski, ed. ISBN 1565181425 (paper).

IVA.20 *Liberalization and Transformation of Morality in Post-communist Countries: Polish Philosophical Studies, IV*. Tadeusz Buksinski. ISBN 1565181786 (paper).

IVA.21 *Islamic and Christian Cultures: Conflict or Dialogue: Bulgarian Philosophical Studies, III*. Plament Makariev, ed. ISBN 156518162X (paper).

IVA.22 *Moral, Legal and Political Values in Romanian Culture: Romanian Philosophical Studies, IV*. Mihaela Czobor-Lupp and J. Stefan Lupp, eds. ISBN 1565181700 (paper).

IVA.23 *Social Philosophy: Paradigm of Contemporary Thinking: Lithuanian Philosophical Studies, III*. Jurate Morkuniene. ISBN 1565182030 (paper).

IVA.24 *Romania: Cultural Identity and Education for Civil Society: Romanian Philosophical Studies, V*. Magdalena Dumitrana, ed. ISBN 156518209X (paper).

IVA.25 *Polish Axiology: the 20th Century and Beyond: Polish Philosophical Studies, V*. Stanislaw Jedynak, ed. ISBN 1565181417 (paper).

IVA.26 *Contemporary Philosophical Discourse in Lithuania: Lithuanian Philosophical Studies, IV*. Jurate Baranova, ed. ISBN 156518-2154 (paper).

IVA.27 *Eastern Europe and the Challenges of Globalization: Polish Philosophical Studies, VI*. Tadeusz Buksinski and Dariusz Dobrzanski, ed. ISBN 1565182189 (paper).

IVA.28 *Church, State, and Society in Eastern Europe: Hungarian Philosophical Studies, I*. Miklós Tomka. ISBN 156518226X (paper).

IVA.29 *Politics, Ethics, and the Challenges to Democracy in 'New Independent States': Georgian Philosophical Studies, II*. Tinatin Bochorishvili, William Sweet, Daniel Ahern, eds. ISBN 9781565182240 (paper).

IVA.30 *Comparative Ethics in a Global Age: Russian Philosophical Studies II*. Marietta T. Stepanyants, eds. ISBN 978-1565182356 (paper).

IVA.31 *Identity and Values of Lithuanians: Lithuanian Philosophical Studies, V*. Aida Savicka, eds. ISBN 9781565182367 (paper).

IVA.32 *The Challenge of Our Hope: Christian Faith in Dialogue: Polish Philosophical Studies, VII*. Waclaw Hryniewicz. ISBN 9781565182370 (paper).

IVA.33 *Diversity and Dialogue: Culture and Values in the Age of Globalization*. Andrew Blasko and Plamen Makariev, eds. ISBN 9781565182387 (paper).

IVA. 34 *Civil Society, Pluralism and Universalism: Polish Philosophical Studies, VIII*. Eugeniusz Gorski. ISBN 9781565182417 (paper).

IVA.35 *Romanian Philosophical Culture, Globalization, and Education*: *Romanian Philosophical Studies VI*. Stefan Popenici and Alin Tat and, eds. ISBN 9781565182424 (paper).

IVA.36 *Political Transformation and Changing Identities in Central and Eastern Europe: Lithuanian Philosophical Studies, VI*. Andrew Blasko and Diana Janušauskienė, eds. ISBN 9781565182462 (paper).

IVA.37 *Truth and Morality: The Role of Truth in Public Life: Romanian Philosophical Studies, VII*. Wilhelm Dancă, ed. ISBN 9781565182493 (paper).

IVA.38 *Globalization and Culture: Outlines of Contemporary Social Cognition: Lithuanian Philosophical Studies, VII*. Jurate Morkuniene, ed. ISBN 9781565182516 (paper).

IVA.39 *Knowledge and Belief in the Dialogue of Cultures*, *Russian Philosophical Studies, III*. Marietta Stepanyants, ed. ISBN 9781565182622 (paper).

IVA.40 *God and the Post-Modern Thought: Philosophical Issues in the Contemporary Critique of Modernity. Polish Philosophical Studies, IX*. Józef Życiński. ISBN 9781565182677 (paper).

IVA.41 *Dialogue among Civilizations, Russian Philosophical Studies, IV*. Nur Kirabaev and Yuriy Pochta, eds. ISBN 9781565182653 (paper).

IVA.42 *The Idea of Solidarity: Philosophical and Social Contexts, Polish Philosophical Studies, X*. Dariusz Dobrzanski, ed. ISBN 9781565182961 (paper).

IVA.43 *God's Spirit in the World: Ecumenical and Cultural Essays, Polish Philosophical Studies, XI*. Waclaw Hryniewicz. ISBN 9781565182738 (paper).

IVA.44 *Philosophical Theology and the Christian Traditions: Russian and Western Perspectives, Russian Philosophical Studies, V*. David Bradshaw, ed. ISBN 9781565182752 (paper).

Series V. Latin American Philosophical Studies

V.1 *The Social Context and Values: Perspectives of the Americas*. O. Pegoraro, ed. ISBN 081917355X (paper); 0819173541 (cloth).

V.2 *Culture, Human Rights and Peace in Central America*. Raul Molina and Timothy Ready, eds. ISBN 0819173576 (paper); 0819173568 (cloth).

V.3 *El Cristianismo Aymara: Inculturacion o Culturizacion?* Luis Jolicoeur. ISBN 1565181042 (paper).

V.4 *Love as theFoundation of Moral Education and Character Development.* Luis Ugalde, Nicolas Barros and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565180801 (paper).

V.5 *Human Rights, Solidarity and Subsidiarity: Essays towards a Social Ontology.* Carlos E.A. Maldonado ISBN 1565181107 (paper).

V.6 A New World: *A Perspective from Ibero America.* H. Daniel Dei, ed. ISBN 978-1-56518-263-9 (paper).

Series VI. Foundations of Moral Education

VI.1 *Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent.* G. McLean and F. Ellrod, eds. ISBN 156518001-1 (paper); ISBN 1565180003 (cloth).

VI.2 *Psychological Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: An Integrated Theory of Moral Development.* R. Knowles, ed. ISBN 156518002X (paper); 156518003-8 (cloth).

VI.3 *Character Development in Schools and Beyond.* Kevin Ryan and Thomas Lickona, eds. ISBN 1565180593 (paper); 156518058-5 (cloth).

VI.4 *The Social Context and Values: Perspectives of the Americas.* O. Pegoraro, ed. ISBN 081917355X (paper); 0819173541 (cloth).

VI.5 *Chinese Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development.* Tran van Doan, ed. ISBN 1565180321 (paper); 156518033 (cloth).

VI.6 *Love as theFoundation of Moral Education and Character Development.* Luis Ugalde, Nicolas Barros and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565180801 (paper).

Series VII. Seminars on Culture and Values

VII.1 *The Social Context and Values: Perspectives of the Americas.* O. Pegoraro, ed. ISBN 081917355X (paper); 0819173541 (cloth).

VII.2 *Culture, Human Rights and Peace in Central America.* Raul Molina and Timothy Ready, eds. ISBN 0819173576 (paper); 0819173568 (cloth).

VII.3 *Relations Between Cultures.* John A. Kromkowski, ed. ISBN 1565180089 (paper); 1565180097 (cloth).

VII.4 *Moral Imagination and Character Development: Volume I, The Imagination.* George F. McLean and John A. Kromkowski, eds. ISBN 1565181743 (paper).

VII.5 *Moral Imagination and Character Development: Volume II, Moral Imagination in Personal Formation and Character Development.* George F. McLean and Richard Knowles, eds. ISBN 1565181816 (paper).

VII.6 *Moral Imagination and Character Development: Volume III, Imagination in Religion and Social Life.* George F. McLean and John K. White, eds. ISBN 1565181824 (paper).

VII.7 *Hermeneutics and Inculturation*. George F. McLean, Antonio Gallo, Robert Magliola, eds. ISBN 1565181840 (paper).

VII.8 *Culture, Evangelization, and Dialogue.* Antonio Gallo and Robert Magliola, eds. ISBN 1565181832 (paper).

VII.9 *The Place of the Person in Social Life*. Paul Peachey and John A. Kromkowski, eds. ISBN 1565180127 (paper); 156518013-5 (cloth).

VII.10 *Urbanization and Values.* John A. Kromkowski, ed. ISBN 1565180100 (paper); 1565180119 (cloth).

VII.11 *Freedom and Choice in a Democracy, Volume I: Meanings of Freedom*. Robert Magliola and John Farrelly, eds. ISBN 1565181867 (paper).

VII.12 *Freedom and Choice in a Democracy, Volume II: The Difficult Passage to Freedom*. Robert Magliola and Richard Khuri, eds. ISBN 1565181859 (paper).

VII 13 *Cultural Identity, Pluralism and Globalization* (2 volumes). John P. Hogan, ed. ISBN 1565182170 (paper).

VII.14 *Democracy: In the Throes of Liberalism and Totalitarianism.* George F. McLean, Robert Magliola, William Fox, eds. ISBN 1565181956 (paper).

VII.15 *Democracy and Values in Global Times: With Nigeria as a Case Study*. George F. McLean, Robert Magliola, Joseph Abah, eds. ISBN 1565181956 (paper).

VII.16 *Civil Society and Social Reconstruction*. George F. McLean, ed. ISBN 1565180860 (paper).

VII.17 *Civil Society: Who Belongs?* William A.Barbieri, Robert Magliola, Rosemary Winslow, eds. ISBN 1565181972 (paper).

VII.18 *The Humanization of Social Life: Theory and Challenges*. Christopher Wheatley, Robert P. Badillo, Rose B. Calabretta, Robert Magliola, eds. ISBN 1565182006 (paper).

VII.19 *The Humanization of Social Life: Cultural Resources and Historical Responses*. Ronald S. Calinger, Robert P. Badillo, Rose B. Calabretta, Robert Magliola, eds. ISBN 1565182006 (paper).

VII.20 *Religious Inspiration for Public Life: Religion in Public Life, Volume I*. George F. McLean, John A. Kromkowski and Robert Magliola, eds. ISBN 1565182103 (paper).

VII.21 *Religion and Political Structures from Fundamentalism to Public Service: Religion in Public Life, Volume II*. John T. Ford, Robert A. Destro and Charles R. Dechert, eds. ISBN 1565182111 (paper).

VII.22 *Civil Society as Democratic Practice*. Antonio F. Perez, Semou Pathé Gueye, Yang Fenggang, eds. ISBN 1565182146 (paper).

VII.23 *Ecumenism and Nostra Aetate in the 21st Century*. George F. McLean and John P. Hogan, eds. ISBN 1565182197 (paper).

VII.24 *Multiple Paths to God: Nostra Aetate: 40 years Later*. John P. Hogan, George F. McLean & John A. Kromkowski, eds. ISBN 1565182200 (paper).

VII.25 *Globalization and Identity*. Andrew Blasko, Taras Dobko, Pham Van Duc and George Pattery, eds. ISBN 1565182200 (paper).

VII.26 *Communication across Cultures: The Hermeneutics of Cultures and Religions in a Global Age*. Chibueze C. Udeani, Veerachart Nimanong, Zou Shipeng, Mustafa Malik, eds. ISBN: 9781565182400 (paper).

VII.27 *Symbols, Cultures and Identities in a Time of Global Interaction*. Paata Chkheidze, Hoang Thi Tho and Yaroslav Pasko, eds. ISBN 9781565182608 (paper).

VII. 28 *Restorying the 'Polis':Civil Society as Narrative Reconstruction*. Yuriy Pochta, Rosemary Winslow, eds. ISNB 978-1-56518- (paper).

VII.29 *History and Cultural Identity: Retrieving the Past, Shaping the Future*. John P. Hogan, ed. ISBN 978-1-56518-268-4 (paper).

Series VIII. Christian Philosophical Studies

VIII.1 *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age, Christian Philosophical Studies, I.* Charles Taylor, José Casanova and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN9781565182745 (paper).

VIII.2 *God's Spirit in the World: Ecumenical and Cultural Essays, Christian Philosophical Studies, II*. Waclaw Hryniewicz. ISBN 9781565182738 (paper).

VIII.3 *Philosophical Theology and the Christian Traditions: Russian and Western Perspectives, Christian Philosophical Studies, III*. David Bradshaw, ed. ISBN 9781565182752 (paper).

VIII4. *On Suffering and Spirituality, Christian Philosophical Studies, IV*. Francis Demers. ISBN 978156518 (paper).

The International Society for Metaphysics

ISM.1 *Person and Nature*. George F. McLean and Hugo Meynell, eds. ISBN 0819170267 (paper); 0819170259 (cloth).

ISM.2 *Person and Society*. George F. McLean and Hugo Meynell, eds. ISBN 0819169250 (paper); 0819169242 (cloth).

ISM.3 *Person and God*. George F. McLean and Hugo Meynell, eds. ISBN 0819169382 (paper); 0819169374 (cloth).

ISM.4 *The Nature of Metaphysical Knowledge*. George F. McLean and Hugo Meynell, eds. ISBN 0819169277 (paper); 0819169269 (cloth).

ISM.5 *Philosophhical Challenges and Opportunities of Globalization*. Oliva Blanchette, Tomonobu Imamichi and George F. McLean, eds. ISBN 1565181298 (paper).

ISM.6 *The Dialogue of Cultural Traditions: Global Perspective*. William Sweet, George F. McLean, Tomonobu Imamichi, Safak Ural, O. Faruk Akyol, eds. ISBN 9781565182585 (paper).