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Rethinking Universalism and Particularism in African Philosophy: Towards an Eclectic Approach

by

Mutshidzi Maraganedzha

**Supervisor:
Prof Bernard Matolino**

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Classics.

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University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg
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Declaration

The author declares that the content of this thesis is his work unless the contrary has been specifically indicated. This thesis has not been submitted in any form for any specific degree to any other university across the world. Citations, references and to a greater extent borrowed ideas are properly acknowledged within the text.

Signed: _____

Mutshidzi Maraganedzha

Student No. 207505743

Date

I declare that this work has been submitted with the approval of the University supervisor.

Signed: _____

Prof. Bernard Matolino

School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Date

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my late father, Khamusi Samson Maraganedzha who passed-away at the beginning of my doctoral studies.

Abstract

The study focuses on the dispute between the universalists and particularists in the characterization of the nature of African philosophy. In African philosophy the debate is formulated as a dichotomy between the universalists and the particularists. At the center of this debate is the notion of ‘universal’ and its relationship to the particular. The universalists argue that the nature of (African) philosophy—its methodology and subject matter—has to be universal and should be the same when applied to Western and African thought systems. In essence, the universalist thesis holds that African philosophy should be critical and not descriptive of African beliefs. Nevertheless, against this universalist thesis, the particularist camp argues that different cultures have different ways of explaining reality. Hence, Africans must have a philosophy different from other philosophies. It is evident from the foregoing that there is an impasse between the universalists and particularists’ conception of the nature of philosophy. The study contends that the solution to the impasse lies on investigating the true nature of ‘universal’ as it is at the center of the debate. The researcher is of the opinion that there is a need to go past the philosophical universalism as it neglects the true nature of universals. Consequently, there is a need for an alternative nature of (African) philosophy hinged on acknowledging that the nature of ‘universal’ is dependent on the ‘particular’ but not independent of its ‘particular’. It is argued that the viable and robust nature of (African) philosophy and what African philosophers should aspire to, is premised on their humanity; being a member of particular group and still be a member of homo sapiens at large.

Keywords: Universals, Particulars, Universalists, Particularists, Philosophy, the Problem of universals

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General Introduction

Much of the interest in African philosophy, as a philosophical tradition, has been exhausted in the debate on the nature and status of African philosophy vis-à-vis its Western counterpart. The problem of demonstrating that African philosophy exists was central to the focus of African philosophers. The burden of acknowledging the character, nature and methodology of African philosophy also consumed African philosophers. Hence, a number of trends¹ were introduced in African philosophy, or what other philosophers prefer to call ‘approaches’ to African philosophy (Oruka, 2003). Henry Odera Oruka suggests that there are six trends² in examining philosophy in the African context, and these had been seen by scholars as an interesting contribution during the early period of the debate on the status of African philosophy and its relevancy in the global sphere.

The debate on the nature and status of African philosophy came to be known as the great debate (Nwala, 2007: 37). This debate is great because “...of the consummate passion, rigor, extensive interest generated and a vast amount of literature that poured out in the process” (*ibid*). Unsurprisingly, the debate aroused a wide range of commentators beginning in the 1970s and was closed in the 1990s. The key questions central to this debate include: What is African philosophy? What body of knowledge qualifies as the proper content of the ‘Philosophy’ in African philosophy?

Central to this debate is the concept of philosophy. The concept of philosophy is one of the concepts that is widely misunderstood concerning its nature, scope and method (Gyekye, 1997). This misunderstanding led to a disagreement amongst African philosophers (Wiredu, 1980); (Oruka, 1975); (Hountondji, 1983); (Van Hook, 1997); (Gyekye, 1997). These disagreements

¹ In the course of narration, I use the terms “trends” and “approaches” interchangeably.

² I am aware that it would be a worthwhile springboard to start with the discussion of the six trends of African philosophy in detail. But that will derail the focus on the current project. As the current project focuses on the later discussions of the debate about the nature of African philosophy. I conceive the debate about the nature of African philosophy to be in two waves. The first wave of the discussions about the nature of philosophy was oriented towards accounting to the question of whether the African philosophy exists. But, the second wave worries about the question whether African philosophy meets the universal standards of doing philosophy or does it exhibit the universal characteristics that qualifies any intellectual activity to be called a philosophy. I do not see the above waves as distinct but as continuous discussions on the nature of African philosophy.

divided African philosophy into two distinct philosophical positions, namely: the universalists and the particularists. These terms were subsequently used in the debate between the two groups.

The nature of African philosophy, that is, what constitutes African philosophy as such, as well as what the distinctive characteristics of philosophical traditions in Africa are, continue to generate a lot of debate among scholars. The universalist argues that the nature of philosophy – its methodology and subject matter - has to be universal and should be the same when applied to Western and African thought systems (Van Hook, 1997; see also Li, 1998; Kanu, 2013). In essence, the universalist thesis holds that African philosophy should be critical and not descriptive of African beliefs. For African philosophy to be called philosophy, it has to depict those characteristics of rigorous and critical analysis (Van Hook, 1997). Nevertheless, against this universalist thesis, the particularist camp argues that different cultures have different ways of explaining reality. Hence, Africans must have a philosophy different from other philosophies (Ozumba, 1995; see also Gyekye, 1997). It views any attempt to detach philosophy from particular contexts, as the universalists do, as making philosophy a rarefied thing (Kanu, 2013). In view of the foregoing, there seems to be perpetual tension and contestation on the merits between Universalist and Particularist approaches in examining African philosophy. While scientificity, logic, criticism and argumentation are significant in doing philosophy in any context, as universalists would want us to believe, their thesis runs the risk of imposing Western ideologies and principles on African philosophy. On the other hand, there is the insistence of the particularist thesis that African philosophy should be “rooted” in African traditions and cultures (Mangena, 2014: 96). It can be argued, therefore, that African philosophy cannot only be a culture-oriented type of philosophy, nor one that simply mirrors scientific principles that are alien to the African experience. Against this backdrop, there is an apparent impasse between the universalists and the particularists approaches to African philosophy.

Pauline Hountondji (1983) conceived the debate as one concerning the methodology of doing African philosophy. But on the other hand, Kwame Gyekye conceived the debate as concerning the idea or the concept of philosophy. Hence, he argues that:

...philosophy is its own time apprehended in thought. Now does all this mean that the relevance of the ideas, insight, arguments, and conclusions of philosophers -who necessarily have belonged to some time, culture, or society - is to be tethered to those

times, cultures, or societies? The answer to this question depends on whether one perceives philosophical ideas or doctrines as particular, that is, relative and relevant to the times and cultures from which they emerged or as universal, that is, as transcending the times and cultures that begat them (Gyekye, 1997: 28).

The debate between the universalists and particularists has been formulated with the aim of understanding the concept of philosophy in terms of its character, nature and method. On this matter, it would not be an exaggeration to note that the debate transcends the issue of methodology. Hountondji argues that “one does not philosophize without some method and prior knowledge, that philosophy requires a rather special ability on the part of the practitioners” (1983: 71). What is central to the debate between the universalists and the particularists is the concept of universal—that is to say—the relationship between the universal and particular, in the nature of (African) philosophy. What is visible from a critical scrutiny of the debate is that the actual problem lies with the nature and the status of the notion of universal or universals. According to Bruce Janz, “the concept of the universal is one of the most well known in the history of philosophy. For precisely this reason, it is also one of the more opaque concepts. It has been used in a variety of different debates, and given a number of different definitions” (2009: 131). It is quite clear that even Janz is of the opinion that the notion of universal is opaque. And what makes the notion of universally opaque is that it is not clearly understood by philosophy scholars, in most instances.

The concept of universal originated from the debate between Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle opted to criticize Plato’s theory of forms as he had problems with a central claim by Plato about forms. Aristotle is of the view that the claim that forms are ‘one over many’ is problematic in nature. It is worth noting that Aristotle plays a major role in the evolution of the problem of universals. Others might even claim that Aristotle formulated the problem of universals as we know it today. Mostly, Aristotle’s formulation of the debate is not easily understood as it is mystified by a number of self-contradictory and inconsistent statements³. The inconsistency occurs in Aristotle’s talks of how forms can be attributed to the status of universals. Aristotle denies that universals are substance.

It is worth noting that at the heart of Aristotle’s argument against Plato’s theory forms is the question of the separation between the universal and particular. Plato contends that there is a clear

³ See, esp., Code (1984), Owen (1978).

separation between the universal and particular. All in all, the universal is clearly independent of the particular. However, this separation resulted in some fundamental problems in Plato's theory of forms. In his attempt to show that there is a separation between the universal and particular, Aristotle is worried about three questions: 1) Are there unsubstantiated universals? This question can be reformulated as - can universals exist without been particular things? 2) Do universals ontologically exist prior to particulars? Stated otherwise, - is there an asymmetrical ontological dependence between universals and particulars, such that particulars cannot exist without universals or *vice versa*? 3) Do universals remain outside the being (*ousia*, essence) of the things that have them?

Aristotle accuses Plato of making a theoretical commitment to forms in terms of their separation from their particulars. Hence, he is of view that there is no universal that can be separated from its substance (or particular). In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that:

For they [the Platonists] treat Forms both as universal and again as separate and particular. But it has been argued before that it is impossible. The reason why those who say that the substances are universals combined these [universals and particulars] in one is that they did not make them [the substances] the same with sensible things. They thought that sensibles were in a state of flux and that none of them remained, but that the universal was apart from these things and different from them. Socrates gave the impulse to this [view], as we said before, by means of his definitions; but he did not separate them [universals] from the particulars. And he was right not to separate them. This is clear from the results. For it is not possible to get knowledge without the universal, but separating is the cause of the difficulties arising about the Forms. Since the Platonists, on the assumption that any substance besides the sensible and flowing ones had to be separate, had no others, they set apart universally predicated substances, so that it followed that universals and particulars were almost the same sort of thing. This in itself, then, would be one difficulty for the view discussed (1086a31-b11).

It is clear in the passage above, that Aristotle takes forms to be both universals and particular combined. Hence, he contends that Plato is wrong to characterize universals and particulars as separate entities. The reason for this is that "they did not make them [the substances] the same with sensible things" (1086 a31). But Socrates did not make that separation between the universals and particulars. The ontological commitment of Aristotle is visible when he combines universals and particulars in the *Categories*. It is worthwhile noting that, the terminologies used in the *Categories*, by Aristotle, differ from the use of 'universal' and 'particular'. In his conclusion in the *Categories*, Aristotle contends that "if the primary

substances did not exist, it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist” (2b5).

I am of the view (as I will argue in the final chapter) that Aristotle provides an interesting solution to the problem of universals when interpreted accurately. Aristotle suggests that there has to be some element of reduction of the ontological distinction between the universals and particulars. But the problem that seems to persist is that of the universals being independent of their particulars. This is a profound problem that seems to be insoluble in philosophy. In the light of the questions above, it might be feasible to formulate a solution that can do away with problem. I will focus on this matter later in the thesis.

As the current dissertation will focus on the problem of universals in African philosophical tradition, it might be useful had the debate between Western philosophy and African philosophy been formulated differently. This difference does actually exist in African philosophical literature. Janz, for example, observed that the formulation of the problem of universals in Wiredu and Gyekye’s works differs. Hence, Janz (2009: 139) argues that “Wiredu was interested in finding a basis for communication between cultures, whilst Gyekye is interested in determining whether ideas can travel. The two questions are not identical but are related. Wiredu addresses the preconditions for conversations Gyekye addresses the content of conversation”.

Adeshina Afolayan argues that “from the specifically metaphysical altercations between the realists and the nominalists, we can abstract certain culturally specific problematics” (2009: 363-364). Hence, he formulates the question - “How does the universal category of, say, the human appropriate particular experiences?” (Afolayan, 2009: 364). It is through his insight that we can be able to see the connection between the debates between Western and African philosophy. They are both concerned with the nature of the category of universals, so as to solve some fundamental problems of our existence as Human beings. But the current study is concerned with the problem of universals in African philosophy, that is formulated as a question as to whether philosophical ideas are particular, that is to say questioning whether they are tied to time and place, or whether they are universal (Gyekye, 1997).

This has been a test that African philosophers have had to endure so as to come up with the conception of African philosophy that will be able to “fruitfully engage in the activity of modern

philosophizing with an African conscience” (Wiredu, 1980: x). Wiredu further says that “if African philosophy means traditional African philosophy, as surprisingly many seem to think, then we can forget any pretence of modern philosophizing” (*ibid*). Hence, Wiredu (1980: 33) assumes that philosophy can be universal. But if there is an insistence that philosophy means traditional, then we should “abstain from such disciplines as symbolic logic and its philosophical interpretation; the philosophy of mathematics and of the natural and social sciences; the theory of knowledge associated with the foregoing disciplines and the moral, political and social philosophy which has arisen as a response to the needs of modern times” (Wiredu, 1980: x).

This study has divided the issues as follows; in the first three chapters, I discuss origin of the problem of universals and making the connection to the African philosophical problem between the universalists and the particularists. In the first section (of chapter one) I discuss the origin, and development of the problem of universals in philosophy. I then try to show the similarity between the Western and African philosophical debate regarding the relationship between universals and particulars. In the second chapter, I provide an overview of the great debate in African philosophy that had come to be known as the debate between the universalists and the particularists. The third chapter focuses on the rejoinder of the problem of universals in African philosophy. In the rejoinder I offer the contemporary debates on the problem of universals in African philosophy concerning the nature of (African) philosophy. The last two chapters focus on portraying the picture of the dichotomy between the universalists and the particularists that several African philosophers think exists. I do so in terms of the arguments offered for their positions on the nature, character and method of philosophy. In the fourth chapter, I sketch a theoretical dichotomy of envisaging philosophy as purely universal or as purely particular. I argue that there is a problem when we conceive philosophy as either universal or particular in their extreme end. However, I argue that the problem lies elsewhere. I am of the view that the problem is not with the character or even the method of philosophy itself, but the category of universal that African philosophers wish to loosely attribute to (African) ‘philosophy’ without due investigation.

In chapter one, I—as mentioned above—discuss the origin of the debate of universals. The debate of universals or the problem of universals has been traced back to the origin of philosophy, the debate between Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle argues with his mentor Plato on his theory of forms. It is in this debate that the problem of universals originated. I further argue that the debate of

universals became the dominant one in the medieval era. It is in this era, that Porphyry revived, in his *Isagoge*, the problem of universals. That was later commented on by Boethius. This chapter also shows that the debate between the realists, nominalists and the conceptualists is fundamentally about the problem of universals. At the center of this submission, it can be argued that there seem to be two ways that the term of universal is used in Western philosophy. The later part of the chapter attempts to make a connection between the debate of universals in the Western philosophical tradition and African philosophical tradition. On this, I argue that both traditions, as much as they are concerned with different subject matters, are concerned about the same categories of universals and particulars. It is in these categories that we can see the similarities that exist between the philosophical traditions. All in all, what is central to both the Western and African philosophical debates is the relationship between the universals and particulars. Having established this fact, I note that there is some similarity between the Western philosophical debates and African philosophical debates on the problems of universals.

In the second chapter, I provide an overview of the classical debate in African philosophy about the nature, character and method of African philosophy between the Universalists and the Particularists. This chapter aims to provide a critical evaluation of the analysis of the great debate of the nature of African philosophy. It will be worthwhile to provide a clear picture of the arguments that had been advanced by debate between the universalists and the particularists. As this study, is centered on the debate between the universalists and the particularists in African philosophy I deem it worthwhile to start at the beginning so as to provide a clear picture on how the things started and developed until to the current situation. This chapter will exhaustively and considerably attempt to shed some light on the question of what may count as philosophy and the sense in which the philosophy scholars have attempted to account for the activity of doing philosophy in our context. This chapter is structured as follows; in the first section it will extensively look at the great debate in African philosophy concerning the nature of African philosophy. It will also attempt to show some of the fundamental differences that exist between the philosophy scholars on the nature of African philosophy. The differences amongst the scholars of philosophy do not necessarily exist between those philosophers who take different positions on the method and the subject matter of philosophy but even those who belongs to the same philosophical camp. Hence, the researcher will argue that there are differences that exist even

within the same camp. In doing so, I will also entertain the idea of which way of doing philosophy as a field of inquiry is more conducive to a study. This is a dogmatic position that has been held without due analysis. Jay M. Van Hook (1997: 387), on this account, argues that “there is a widely held dogma among contemporary African philosophers, one not often stated explicitly by Western philosophers although it will be implicit in the way many or even most of them conceptualize their discipline”. The dogma that Van Hook is referring to is the “universalists thesis” (ibid). It is this dogmatic position on the nature of (African) philosophy that the particularists seek to combat.

In light of the afore-discussed, the sole aim of this chapter is to provide a critical evaluation of the analysis of the great debate of the nature of African philosophy. I find it worthwhile to provide a clear picture of the arguments that had been advanced by debate between the universalists and the particularists. As this study, is centered on the debate between the universalists and the particularists in African philosophy. In the first section of this chapter I will offer an extensive picture of great debate in African philosophy concerning the nature of African philosophy. It will also attempt to show some of the fundamental differences that exist between the philosophy scholars on the nature of African philosophy. The differences amongst the scholars of philosophy do not necessarily exist between those philosophers who take different positions on the method and the subject matter of philosophy but even those who belongs to the same philosophical camp.

The third chapter discuss the rejoinder of the problem of universals in African philosophy which focuses on contemporary literature. The chapter argues that, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze in his attempt to understand the benefits of the relationship between analytical and African philosophy, formulated a rejoinder to the debates of universals in African philosophy. It is worth noting that Jones in his response to the rejoinder, offers a defense of the combination of the ‘ultra-faithful and anti-import’. Bernard Matolino is critical of Jones’ universalism. Matolino, on his part, has induced some degree of criticism on Jones’ universalism so as to show some fundamental weakness in his universalism. This, I consider to be the pinnacle of the debate in the 20th century debate in African philosophy in terms of the idea of universals. In view of the debate, I argued that there is a need for philosophy to see past philosophical universalism. In the third and final sections, I offer a cursory alternative to philosophical universalism as proposed by Janz (2009; 2016; 2015; see also Chimakonam 2015). My introduction of the alternative route that African philosophy can take as a philosophical tradition is not to offer a solution to the problem that I have highlighted so far, but

a way of demonstrating that there are other conversations that are happening regarding other questions that are similar in nature but worry about the nature of African philosophy.

The fourth chapter simply aims to demonstrate that there is a dichotomy between the universalists and the particularists in African philosophy. This is tantamount to saying that in African philosophy, the Universalists and the Particularists are incompatible. Hence, the attempt to investigate the implications of imagining philosophy as exclusively universal or particular.

In the fifth, I attempt a critical examination of the nature and status of universals. The previous two chapters intend to establish that the underlying concept of the debate between the universalists and particularists is universal. But if we overlook the nature and the status of universal by merely asserting it as problematic without a thorough analyses of its true nature. This move potentially has undesirable consequences in the conclusion that we can arrive at; even in the nature of African philosophy. I argue that understanding the nature of the concept of universals might untangle the confusion that exists in the debate between the universalists and the particularists. The sole reason for my attention to the nature of the concept of universal, is because of this unwarranted wide acceptance of the universalist's thesis without a proper analysis. If we take the concept of universals seriously as a category, then there is a need for a proper investigation into what is its nature and status. According to Jorg Schroth, the conflict between the "universalists and particularists is due to the misunderstanding of the universal thesis" (2003: 455). In view of this observation, it is clear that there are some confusions and uncertainties in the conflict between the universalists and particularists. Mostly, as Schroth has suggested, this confusion is due to the lack of clarity regarding the concept of universals. This absence of clarity has the potential of distorting the goal of a philosophy that is universal in character. In this chapter, firstly, I attempt to see the feasibility of an eclectic approach to the nature (African) philosophy that acknowledges that universal is dependent on the particular. Secondly, the nature of concept of universals. In my analysis of the ontological status of 'universals' I differ with Plato who conceives 'universals' as independent things that are permeant and perfect. I argue that they are actually heavily reliance on the particular for their existence. This is so because I take it that universal can and can only exists after we have instantiated their particulars. It is on this account that I propound my eclecticism that occurs at the level of the ontological dependence between the universals and particulars.

Chapter One

Universalism and Particularism: Its Origin and Development

1. Introduction

The debate between the universal and particular is as old as the discipline of philosophy itself. In Western philosophy the debate of ‘universals and particulars’ was introduced by Aristotle (Hallen, 2002: 34). This is fascinating as in philosophy the debate of the universals and particulars has persisted, thus posing a concern in philosophical circles. In other words, the debate evokes questions like; are there universals? If yes, what are these universals? These questions have led to two antagonistic positions, firstly, those who argue that there are universals and those who argue that there are no universals, called the particulars. There are arguments to support the view that there are universals. On the other hand, there are arguments that no universals exist. In short, this debate is quite broadly spread in philosophical discussions, and this will be contextually reflected in this study.

This chapter aims to evaluate the philosophical problem of universalism in the midst of the existing level of debate about the concept. The study intends to expand the debate that the problem of universals, that can also be understood as a debate between the universals and particular, has persisted over some time, in other instances the debate can be said to have existed since the inception of philosophy. This chapter does not intend to engage in philosophically argument either for or against the views or positions of philosophers or scholars of philosophy, rather this chapter seeks to provide a picture of how the debate of universals and particulars in the philosophy discipline has evolved over time.

Structurally, this chapter begins with a brief account of what is the doctrine of universalism as used in this study. It is the view of this researcher that it is important to give an account of what the meaning of the concept is, that informs the debate at hand. In the second section, the study moves on to discussing the origin of the debate between universals and particulars. In the third section, the chapter will be concerned with the development of debate in terms of the trending

narratives. In the fourth section, the study attempts to draw a connection between the discussions on the universal and particulars in the Western and African philosophical traditions. In the fifth and final section, this chapter will attempt to situate the nature of African philosophy to determine whether philosophy is universal or not, to be able to identify the connections between the universalists and the particularists.

1.2. Universals and particulars: A Brief History

Universalisms are theories, in any area of study, that attempt to argue to be valid for or for everyone (Ingram, 2014: 3752). These theories hold a condition that for any aspects of people to attain the status of being universal it has to apply to all human beings and their cultures or contexts (Ingram, 2014). The concept of philosophy, as conceived and interpreted by many philosophers, is taken to be universal by nature (Wiredu, 1980; see also Hountondji, 1983; Hallen, 2002). This is in light with its the aspirations and search for general truth (Ingram, 2014). Hence, philosophy is conceived to be universal in terms of its character nature, and method. In the idea of ‘universals’ in Western philosophy it is traced back to Plato’s knowledge of ideas (or forms)—that are permanent and universal—while particular things are imperfect and temporary (*ibid*). For Aristotle, contrary to Plato’s dualism theory, true knowledge is knowledge of natural forms that is constituted by the essence of particulars (*ibid*). The metaphysical debates over ‘universals’ it took place in the medieval era between the realists and nominalists. The metaphysical debate over the ‘universals’ have larger implications beyond the terrain of metaphysics, i.e; in political theory and social theory. The concept of ‘democracy’ is one of the mostly controversial notion in literature that is said to carry the status of being ‘universal’. But, as to provide as cursory picture of the debate over the universality of democracy, there are several disputes over the point that democracy as presented is universal. Francis Fukuyama holds that the concept of democracy is universal in nature. But, in he argues for a universalist position that hinged itself on liberal democratic values by stating that a liberal state is universally triumphant (Fukuyama, 1992). Fukuyama (1992: xiv) is of view that liberalism is a universal phenomenon, and industrial development that characterises it must follow a capitalistic universal pattern set by the West. It is in light of this perception that Fukuyama further argues that:

...all countries undergoing economic modernization must increasingly resemble one another; they must unify on the basis of a centralised state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization (like tribe, sect and family) with economically rational ones based on function and efficiency, and provide for universal education [democracy] of their citizens (1992: xv).

In view of the foregoing, it can be concluded that Fukuyama view Western liberal democracy should be conceived as a universal concept, that has to be taken as a viable system over other forms of democracies. This then entails that Fukuyama is of view that Western liberal democracy should replace other contesting democracies and their alternative economic systems. The universalist thinking—concerning liberal democracy—is that it is a terminal form of human government, that has been proven to be most viable and viable to address challenges of development in the third-world nations (Fayemi, 2009: 107-108). This view is not entirely an accurate on the reality of the third-world nations, hence, it will not hold in the contemporary society. This is so due to the fact that “More often than not, the alleged universals have been home-grown particulars” (Wiredu, 1996: 2).

It is evident so far that the debates of ‘universals’ have large implications on political theory, and in some sense, it is connected to the social theory. This emanates from the belief that ethical concepts or social groups are ‘real’ or contingent (Ingram 2014: 3753). The connection between the political and social theory, in terms of the implications of the debate over ‘universals’ is also visible in the discussion of the concept of ‘democracy’. Beside the appeal on the universal principles that governance, like that of; freedom of speech, respect of human dignity and etc. Most of theoretical positions in terms of the concept of democracy is informed by several number of values that are often context or contexts sensitive. Hence, Claude Ake (1993) argues that the failure of liberal democracy in Africa can be attribute to a number of reasons. Firstly, liberal democracy is emerged from a particular culture—European culture. So, importing Western ideas that a product of a particular cultural outlook and aspirations would always lead to an incompatible situation between the concept and its implementation. Ake specifically points out that liberal democracy is “a product of a socially atomized society where production and exchange are already commoditized; a society which is essentially a market. It is a product of a society in which interests are so particularized that the very notion of common interest becomes problematic hence the imperative of democracy” (Ake, 1993: 243-244). As much as this, eludes to the idea of the universality of liberal democracy. The

issue with taking this theoretical position is that other cultural specificity of other cultures would be jeopardized by this process of simply transferring democracy from one context to the other. And this process, will not only undermine specificity but it will also jeopardize the legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy due to the incompatibility of values that has informed the current concept of democracy with the place that is intended to be implemented. It is in light of this that we start to see the connection between political and social theory, in the discussion of the concept democracy; to be specific liberal democracy it is visible that the concept of democracy is also informed by the social values of the people. These social values have clear bearing on the outlook of the concept of democracy that would emerge.

It is evident from above, that the notion of universalism has a rich history and these debates are still topical in philosophical circles. Hence, one other issue this thesis seeks to investigate is the accurate interpretation of the term ‘universalism’. However, it is clear that the origin of the discussion or debate on the notion of ‘universals’ is found in the Greek philosophy that is generally accepted as the origin of the discipline of philosophy (Hallen, 2002: 34; see also Luscombe, 1997: 16; Milton: 1982: 11; Armstrong, 1978: 126). The proposition that the debate of the problems of universals originated from Greek philosophy brings to bear the idea that Aristotle and Plato, who are the acknowledged “fathers” of philosophy could be said to have ignited the unsettling debate between universalism and particularism.

1.2.1. Plato’s Theory of Forms

The common denominator within the discussion of Plato’s vision of the metaphysics, in literature, is in terms of the dualism between forms and particulars (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 11). The most insightful assessment of the theory of forms is offered by Necip Frikri Alican and Holger Thesleff in their rethinking of Plato’s forms. Alican and Thesleff captured the major concern in the theory of forms that other scholars perhaps ordinarily observed in their definition. The focal point, mostly, in philosophical literature, is the interpretation of Plato’s overall vision of the notion of forms (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 11; see also Fine, 1993: 20). That Plato seems to suggest that the approach is a “...monistic mode of a hierarchically structured universe comprising interdependent levels of reality” (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 11). The term ‘form’ (εἶδος) simply means visible and shape-related to the terms like appearances. The commonly used words are: εἶδος (eidos) and ἰδέα that simply translate to

mean (idea). The discussion of the words was already to be found in the works of Homer, in the earliest Greek literature (American Heritage Dictionary, 2019). In ancient Greek literature the word; φαινόμενα (phainomena) that means ‘appearances’ was synonymous with the word ‘bhā’ (American Heritage Dictionary, 2019). This understanding remained the same until the beginning of philosophy. The pre-Socratic philosophers like Thales, noted that appearances change given the conditions prevailing at every material time. It is from this intuition that they started asking questions around what things changing really is. It is from this contemplation that the theory of matter and form was born. From Plato and possibly pre-Socratic era, forms were considered as being in something else, that Plato called in nature (Physics). In his dialogues there is an attempt to account for what forms are, Plato’s perspective was that there is a form for every object or quality in reality, like; human beings, mountains, colours, courage, love, goodness. Forms in most instances, account for the question ‘what is that?’ However, forms are a real deal of things in the greater scheme of things or nature. But in a situation where there are shadows, such phenomena are simply a mimic of the real form. The question that arises then is - does this entail that, one thing can be many in particular? In other words, forms are a singular thing that cause a plural representation of itself in particular objects. This, as a phenomenon itself, is a problem as it does not make sense. Critical reasoning demonstrates that it is unthinkable to admit that one thing can be generally many things at the same time. These forms represent the essence of various objects: they are that without which a thing would not be the kind of thing it is. For example, there are countless chairs in the world but the Form of chairness is at the core; it is the essence of all of them. Plato argues that forms of whatever kind exist independently of the particular things that ‘participate in’ them. It could be argued that Plato provided a crude definition of the notion of forms (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 11).

In contrast, Gail Fine, in similar vein, argues that “Plato never sets out a theory of forms in systematic details” (Fine, 1993: 20). Fine (1993) concurs that there are some fundamental issues with Plato’s theory of forms. It is not only in terms of the definition of forms, but in other instances which have to do with the systematization of the theory of forms holistically. Fine argues that certainty is not easy to secure as Plato’s arguments offered in defense of his position of the theory of forms are fragmented (Fine, 1993: 20). Fine further argues that in terms of the argument for the theory of forms, Plato offered a vague argument about a

“...precise range and characteristics of forms” (*ibid*). In the next couple of paragraphs, I will attempt to provide an overview of the theory of forms as Plato has propounded.

As mentioned earlier in this section, Alican and Thesleff provide quite an insightful and well thought out position of the theory of forms in Plato’s metaphysics. Alican and Thesleff (2013: 13) argue that “Plato worked within a single world that is stratified into ontological layers with a sliding scale of reality where there is enough room for both forms and particulars as well as for their separation”. So according to Plato’s position on metaphysics, there is a single world that is arranged in a myriad of ontological layers that produce a reality. In this reality there is a space where both forms and particulars actually exist. Hence, Alican and Therleff argue that “...this scenario [depicts] the two-level model”. Referring to the two-level model they further argue that:

...not because there are only two levels, but because forms occupy one level, particulars, another, in a hierarchical ontological configuration comprising layer upon layer, complete with sublayers, collectively representing and facilitating a gradation of reality, both within and between the two levels in question. Otherwise, this is not a binary or bipolar model of reality, nor an attempt to trade one sort of dualism for another, merely substituting the notion of level for that of world (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 13).

Plato envisaged a metaphysical level of forms as one level that is directly denoted from the understanding that there is a single world. This is not to suggest that this claim represents the precise view that Plato had in mind in his visioning process of the theory of forms. In trying to be precise, Alican and Thesleff have interpreted Plato’s metaphysics in terms of the dualistic status that it occupies. Hence, the view that there are two levels in Plato’s ontology forms occupies one level. This ontological level is comprised with sublayers upon layers. And within those layers they are also sublayers. But in essence, those layers depict a picture of the collective grandiose reality. As much as Alican and Thesleff can be accused of just simply substituting the word ‘dualism’ by ‘two-level model’, this study disagrees with them and argues that their submission will be false as they provide an autopsical account of Plato’s overall vision of his metaphysical position. With that in mind, Alican and Thesleff (2013: 13) further argued that “...Plato’s experimentation with abstraction can be understood in terms of three different categories of Forms instead of a single homogenous breed answering for every possibility”. On this account, forms as “candidates can be as diverse as Justice, horse and

motion” (Alican & Thesleff, 2013: 13). There are three proposed classifications of forms, according to Alican and Thesleff. These include ideal forms, conceptual forms and relational forms. Prior to the discussion of these three categories of forms, it would be worthwhile to consider what forms are. “Forms are what particulars are not” (McCabe, 1994: 60). Alican and Thesleff seemed aligned with McCabe’s position but noted “...though with caution, to assert that forms are what universals fail to be. This is not to say that they are not universals, but that they are indeed, and always something more” (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 19-20). Most clearly forms seem to be slightly more than universals might be. In the words of Alican and Thesleff forms:

...are unique, each one being just what it is, and not simply an example of the kind of thing we call ‘Form’. The ‘just itself’, in Plato’s thought, is not identical with what we now call ‘justice’, though we will, for convenience, use the latter term as shorthand (2013: 20).

In the view of Alican and Thesleff’s analysis of Plato’s forms in terms of their nature, forms are slightly beyond what we call universals. It can be presumed that this is so because universals are just a fibre of the entire scheme or the nature of the world from which these forms are deduced.

In their attempt to understand the intrinsic values of Plato’s theory of forms and the definition of forms, Alican and Thesleff proposed that there are three categories of forms as hinted earlier on in this section. The first category of forms is the ideal form. According to Alican and Thesleff (2013: 21), ideal forms are metaphysical transcendental entities that embody the perfection of qualities on the upper level of reality such as justice, temperance, knowledge, etc. “They have an axiological orientation culminating in the Good as a value. Put simply, they are charged with positive intrinsic value” (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 21). In a number of expository and companion to Plato or Plato’s philosophy, scholars seem to be quite comfortable to attribute the quality of transcendent as a proper quality of forms. This is visible in works of scholars like, Allan Silvermann (2012). The other qualities of forms are said to be; “intelligible, paradigmatic, perfect, immutable, simple, and unique” (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 27). This list as a whole is said to be a set of ideal forms alone. It is worthwhile on this note to stipulate that these criteria capture what is intrinsically good about forms from Plato’s point of view (*ibid*).

Alican and Thesleff offered a detailed analysis of the ideal forms in the dialogue which reveals a concentration on entities of moral value which usually go hand-in-hand with aesthetic value. Alican and Thesleff are of view that ideal forms are clearly directly linked with Plato's two-level visions. This view is not entirely new or maybe invented by Alican and Thesleff, but it can be traced to *Phaedo* and the *Republic* as the most representative of the true sense of forms. "In the dialogues, the most detailed discussion of Ideal Forms as the philosopher's specialty can be found in the central books of the *Republic*, beginning with the contrast between 'philosophers' and 'others' (5,475e ff.)" (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 27). The most vital feature of ideal forms is that of being an exalted ontological status that depicts the ultimate reality, "in contrast to the contingent mode of existence at the lower, phenomenal level". Alican and Thesleff further argued that "the importance of this two-level feature is not just metaphysical, but epistemological as well, since the ultimate reality in question, with the stability it embodies, constitutes our only hope of attaining knowledge, the kind grounded in universal truth" (2014: 27). In summary, as Alican and Thesleff put it,

Plato himself points out, this is a much-discussed matter (*poluthrulēta*, *Phaedo* 100b). And the abundance of discussion, of course, is not an indication that the matter, having been thoroughly examined, may now safely be put to rest, but that it is to be investigated further still. Plato often emphasizes its difficulties, even for philosophers. Although the original reference of this discussion is, dramatically, to Socrates and his associates, and, by extension, to Plato and his associates, it holds up rather well in transference to modern scholars and their associates. Two areas where our view differs from those of our associates are, first, that we find Ideal Forms to be charged with positive intrinsic value, a feature implicit in the foregoing discussion and exemplified further below, and, second, that we consider these criteria to be features of Ideal Forms, not of just any Forms, and certainly not of things that are not Forms (*ibid*).

The second category of forms is conceptual forms. Conceptual forms are universals that are of the upper level of reality, corresponding to particulars which are of the lower level of reality. Alican and Thesleff are of the view that universals and particulars are "...with mutual similarity but varying degrees of reality and importance (to Plato), including concrete things like; (horses, ships, water) and their properties; qualities or attributes like (speed, size and colour)" (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 29). Those things that are either imaginary or intrinsically bad because they lack intrinsic value are not conceptual forms.

But, according to Alican and Thesleff, by "adopting the somewhat anachronistic term

‘concept’ for all abstractions representing a universal, or for any type of phenomenon, in imaginary ones, we find no clear distinction in Plato’s works between concepts and the words (names) that represent them” (*ibid*). As much as there are no distinctions, offered by Plato in terms of the concepts and words, linguistic expressions are important not only for Plato, but generally for discussing the concepts.

The linguistic expression is not just ‘the thing’ as Antisthenes and others had asserted. Spoken or written names of things, including what we would call ‘concepts’ as a general term for all abstractions, can always be expressed by words. If such concepts turn out to be ‘real’ or ‘important’ universals from Plato’s perspective, we can expect him to place them on the upper level of his universe analogically with Ideal Forms (*ibid*).

On the other hand, there is an underlying interconnectivity between ideal and conceptual forms. Alican and Thesleff (2013: 30), on this subtle interconnectivity, argue that “from another perspective, even ideal forms are concepts”. As simple as this claim might be, this study argues that there is some subtle theoretical underpinning that substantiates it. From their own vantage point, as much as not all concepts are forms or can qualify as forms, to those concepts that qualified as real universals in view of Plato’s perspective, they can be placed on the upper level of the universe’s reality. It would not be a bewilderment, in view of the above claims, to suggest that there is some subtle interconnectivity between ideal and conceptual forms.

The third category of forms is relational forms. Relational forms are relational universal concepts that are correlative abstractions, taken in contrasting pairs of apparent opposites, jointly covering both levels of the reality and collectively exhausting the entire two –level ontology. Alican and Thesleff (2013: 21) also state that “[relational forms]...too are value-neutral in and of themselves”. In principle, as Alican and Thesleff further argue, relational forms can be “...spotted in the dialogues where they occur, as contrasting pairs of relational universal concepts” (Alican and Thesleff, 2013: 35).

1.2.2. Aristotle on Plato’s Theory of Forms

In the previous section, I have attempted to articulate the theory of forms as Plato envisaged it. In his theory, Plato proposed a dualism of form and matter. I went a step further, in my

narration, to articulate that there are three categories of forms as insightfully postulated by Alican and Thesleff's in their attempt to rethink Plato's notion of forms. As we have noticed in the previous section, Plato proposes a rigid idealism that posits essences or forms as the only reality and treats everything else as unreal and reduced the material world to a mere appearance. Aristotle's theory on the questions of the existence of forms, retains some of the insights that Plato his teacher proposes, but he rejects Plato's transcendentalism. It is clear, on this account, that Aristotle did not find Plato's theory of forms appealing. Plato's theory of forms contends that all material objects are based on universal and immutable concepts that are forms and that for such an object to exist it must share or participate in forms. So, put simply, this is what is called a rigid idealism, there is nothing that exists in a material world that does not constitute forms within them, in everything that is there, these are forms. However, Aristotle seeks to argue that the reality that Plato envisages is not entirely accurate as reality does not depend on universal abstracts (i.e. forms), but it depends on particular substances of the physical things. In what follows, in this section, I seek to postulate metaphysical position that exists between Plato and Aristotle on the question of universals.

At the center of Aristotle's critique of Plato's theory of forms is the idea that universals are not entirely separate from particulars. The Platonians contend that each material object has its own corresponding form that is not embodied in the object itself but separate from it. For example, "things are said to be beautiful in as much as they participate in the Form of Beauty, which is detached from the sensible world. So, a woman is beautiful in as much as she reflects the Form of Beauty, not in that she embodies the Form of beauty. In this case, a particular (the woman) shares in a separate, detached universal (the Form), as opposed to the Form of Beauty being an inherent or intrinsic quality of the woman" (Vezina, 2007: 101).

Laura M. Castelli (2013: 144) argues that Plato is of the view that "(universal) forms and non-sensible substances are connected with a crucial issue, which is the unity of the principles of all beings". She further argues that "each of the principles to which all beings must be led back must be in some sense one. From this perspective, the problem of establishing in which way the principles are one is a crucial philosophical question on the overall structure of being" (Castelli, 2013: 145). Aristotle is concerned with Plato's general principle of unity as an aspect of thought that is faulty in the introduction and the description of the nature of forms

ontologically. In *Met.*, B 6, 1002b12-32, Aristotle argues that there is a need for a theoretical grounding for forms in terms of sensible beings and mathematical entities. Castelli (2013: 163) contends that “Aristotle presents the distinction between universal and particular in relational terms. So, in *Int.*, 7, 17a38-b2; *APr.*, A 27, 43a25 ff. and *Met.*, Z 13, 1038b11-12 Aristotle explains that $\kappa\alpha\text{-}\theta\acute{o}\lambda\omicron\upsilon$ are those things or beings which are such as to be said of many or to belong to many”.

The fundamental problem that Aristotle was worried about from Plato's metaphysical position is the idea that forms a part of all things that exist. On this account, it means that there is nothing that exists without forms: each and everything possesses forms. In the light of this position, Plato further argues that there exists a dualism that is between forms and matter. Aristotle argues that the separation of universals from particulars is faulty. Firstly, Aristotle argues that forms cannot be substances. And if forms are not substances, therefore forms cannot cause a substance to come into being. But, on the other hand, the Platonists hold that forms are separate non-physical entities that underlie all the physical things. Aristotle is quite swift to make the assertion of the implausibility of the "...substance to be separate from what it is the substance of. How, then, if the Forms are the substances of things, could they be separate from them" (*Metaphysics* 991b). Aristotle's concern is quite legitimate in this regard, how can a non-substance affect the qualities of substance. In other words, how can a non-substance form be directly affecting the qualities of the physical substances? "Because the Forms are non-substances, it is impossible, according to Aristotle, for a physical object's substance to be primarily determined by its Form, especially considering that a Form is nothing more than a universal concept. And since an object's Form is a non-material, it would seem impossible for it to be the efficient cause of the object, simply for the reason that, as a non-material, no physical causation is possible" (Vezina, 2007: 102).

It would be worthwhile delving into the discussion of Aristotle's argument on why forms form part of all things that exist, even though they are a non-substance entity. The issue at hand is the impossibility of forms to be everything or in everything. This impossibility is addressed in Book II of the *Physics* by introducing four causes that are responsible for change of things: “the material, formal, efficient and final cause” (Vezina, 2007: 102). Of these four causes, the Platonic forms failed to account for two, that is, material and efficient cause. Aristotle defines

the efficient cause as the “source of the primary principle of change or stability” (194b30). For example, Aristotle states that “Some [Proofs] yield Forms of things that we think have no Forms” (Metaphysics 990b10). In line with this example, Vezina (2007: 102) contends that “it would certainly be a stretch of imagination to conceive that dust and lint have their own Forms”. Then, if this is the case the theory of forms would designate forms to be the most trifling entities that can be reduced to a minute object. Hence, Aristotle was of view that the theory of forms never provided a convincing ontological insightfulness and knowledge of the physical world.

In light of this, Aristotle suggested that the idea that universal concepts are not separate from particular things, but just a mere commonality shared by objects. For example:

Take two yellow flowers, a marigold, and a buttercup, for example. According to a Platonist, the yellow marigold and buttercup exist and are yellow because they both share in the Form of Yellow. Yet it would seem that both flower's color and existence are caused by several Forms: the Form of Yellow, Flower, and Yellow Flower (Vezina, 2007: 102).

Aristotle seems to propose that the idea that ‘forms’ are everything is problematic. Hence, Aristotle suggests that the only things we can talk about are the issues of commonalities of features amongst the objects rather than the assertions of forms. The example, above, captures the idea well. The marigold and buttercup flowers are both yellow in nature and one cannot say that the mere fact that they possess the form of yellow, flower and being a yellow form. Hence, Aristotle suggested that talk of these flowers sharing numerous forms is meaningless and empty. Aristotle, as cited by Vezina, is of a view that the” ‘marigold and buttercup’s color is not caused by a detached form, but that their color is simply a shared quality among the two flowers. The universal is not separate from a particular but inherent in it” (Vezina, 2007: 102).

At the center of Aristotle's theory of ontology of reality are substances. These substances are physical objects, not forms. In asking the question, ‘what is being?’ as Aristotle postulates, one is asking the question ‘what is substance? Aristotle says that for us to be able to understand reality we need to understand the relationship between particular substances and their universal qualities. The question is what does Aristotle mean by substance? In Book V of the Metaphysics: “Substance is spoken of in two ways. It is both the ultimate subject, which is no

longer said of anything else and whatever, being a this, is also separable” (1017b25). A substance, as Aristotle envisages, is described as an individual and particular entity which is not predicated of other things, but all those other things are predicated of it.

Plato and Aristotle are both of the view that physical substances are perpetually in motion and changing. Aristotle, in Book I of *Physics*, explains that objects are subjected to change through many ways such as addition or subtraction. For example, a log that is characterized in terms of being solid and strong: these are its features. However, this same log can be softened and hollowed by insects. In essence, the log passes through stages of transformation from the stage of been strong and solid towards the stage of been soft and hollow (Vezina, 2007). These are the changes Aristotle seems to be talking about. Aristotle is concerned with the persistence of changes in the substance “the things that are without qualification” (*Physics*, 190b). For example, A ball of clay, for instance, can be molded continuously but the clay itself, the substance, persists throughout (Vezina, 2007: 102). Therefore, particulars that are substances consist of form. “Things can only change in so far as they are changeable. For example, as human beings, we can use our reasoning faculties to find happiness and flourish in life in so far as we are potentially reasonable. Indeed, the main goal for us as human beings—and most other living things such as plants and animals—according to Aristotle, is to actualize our potential. In this way, particulars are continually changing in accordance with the potentials inherent in them” (Vezina, 2007: 102).

Aristotle, furthermore, grounds his ontological reality in the sensible world. In so doing, he stated that reality is based on the individual (particular) substances, as stated above. The idea of understanding what is real, as Aristotle puts it, can be attained through observation of individual things. That is to say that reality can be investigated through sciences. This, of course, appeals to our own intuition of the physical world. Plato, on other hand, held that the myth of the Cave Allegory is concerned with the relationship between the world of beings and the world of becoming the forms. The Cave allegory is described also as an image of a number of prisoners that were shackled in a cave with their faces towards the wall. And what they could only see, as projected by the position of the light in the cave were some shadows that were cast on the wall. The prisoners considered these shadows to be reality.

What we all take to be reality consists ultimately of shadows; it is not that these are unreal. They are real shadows, but they are shadows of things that are even more real. So, the distinction here is not, as in Parmenides, between reality and illusion. It is the distinction between more and real less, a superior and an inferior world (metaphysics).

In summary, this section concerned itself with Aristotle's criticism of Plato's theory of forms and at the same time, it induces the theoretical position of Aristotle in metaphysics. It is not surprising for Aristotle to reject Plato's theory of forms as Plato's theory of forms is idealistic in nature, and on the other hand, Aristotle's theory is more empirical in nature. Hence, the position (Plato's) that contends that reality depends on the universal concepts of forms, and it cannot be found through the observation of the sensible world of beings. This position was found to be flawed by Aristotle who is of the view that reality of the sensible world of beings can be conceived through the perception of the sensible world of beings. In light of the previous claim, Aristotle is comfortable to claim that reality as we know it is the reality of substances, and substances are particular in nature. Hence, in the words of Vezina (2007: 103), "Ultimately, [Aristotle] offers a systematic ontology than can be substantiated with physical evidence, with particulars".

1.3. The Development of the debate of Universals

During the middle ages or the medieval era in Western philosophy, the debate of universals became the dominant one, or it was at the center of philosophical discussion (Russell, 1945: 424). David Luscombe (1997: 16) contends that the problem of universals has become less influential in philosophical discussion. It is [Boethius who] "...attempted to revive and to sum up the philosophical learning of the antiquity" (Luscombe: 1997: 16). Hence, Luscombe (1996: 16) argues that "Medieval thinkers owed to Boethius nearly all the knowledge that they possessed of ancient mathematics and musical theory". Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, on the same note, argues that:

The *medieval* problem of universals" (distinguishing it from the both logically and historically related ancient problems of Plato's Theory of Forms) was precisely such a bundle of questions

famously raised by Porphyry in his *Isagoge*....⁴

This background information from the investigations by Boethius appears to have provoked the problems of universals that were vehemently addressed by a number of philosophers in the medieval era. One can even be tempted to conclude that the revival of the debate on universals by Boethius caused mayhem in the medieval era. This researcher believes that the issue that led to the revival of the problem of universals was the question raised by Porphyry concerning universals that was as yet unanswered. Hence, the Latin's commentator that began with Boethius. In the course of his argument, Boethius makes a claim on the notion of universal or what should constitute universals. Universals, according to Boethius, have to be common to several particulars in the following ways:

- a) in its entirety, and not only in part
- b) simultaneously, and not in a temporal succession, and
- c) It should constitute the substance of its particulars.

But Boethius is quite adamant about the existence of such entities or objects. Hence, his argument that nothing in reality can actually satisfy these conditions. The main point in Boethius position can be summarized as follows:

Anything that is common to many things in the required manner has to be simultaneous, and as a whole, in the substance of these many things. But these many things are several beings precisely because they are distinct from one another in their being. That is to say that, the act of being the one is distinct from the act of being the other. However, if the universal constitutes the substance of a particular, then it has to have the same act of being as the particular, because constituting the substance of something means precisely this, namely, sharing the act of being the thing in question, as the thing's substantial part. But the universal is supposed to constitute the substance of all of its distinct particulars, as a whole, at the same time. Therefore, the one act of being the universal entity would have to be identical with all the distinct acts of being its several particulars at the same time, which is impossible⁵.

Therefore, this argument contends that there is no one thing that can be universal in its being. That implies that one entity cannot be common to many entities in as much as it does not share

⁴ Cf. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/universals-medieval/> (Accessed 17 April 2019).

⁵ Cf. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/universals-medieval/> (Accessed 17 April 2019).

some commonalities with those other beings, and constitutes their substance. This was the position that led to several philosophical discussions over the revival of the problems of universals.

It is on this note that Peter Abelard, a student of William of Champeaux sprang to fame by his criticism of his teacher (Luscombe, 1997: 47). “The controversy was over the nature of universals. As a controversy, it sprang into new life with Abelard, but would deny, in changing conditions and contexts, its long life from the time of Plato to the end of the Middle ages, and then again into modern times” (*ibid*). The disputes between Champeaux and Abelard are over the question; “is the universal a noun ‘man’ just a word, or is there a universal nature or thing which is ‘man’?” (*ibid*).

In using the word ‘man’ as predicate, we invoke a species which includes any number of individual members that share common similarities, even though as individuals they are also divided by a number of differences. Socrates and all the other individual men share undeniable resemblances in being men, and in exhibiting a common state or nature. But what is this being ‘man’ and what is this nature? (Luscombe, 1997: 49).

Abelard rejects the notion that it is a particular thing as a thing is always individual. Let us consider an example that is mostly used:

...Socrates is a man. However, when we say Socrates is man, although the proposition is grammatically correct, and although the proposition seems true, the function of the word is what may have led Abelard into protracted enquiry. On the theory - we may call it the identity theory – because it would lead to the view that the sentence indicates an identity of essence between the subject and the predicate; another theory...is that man stands for a universal nature which inheres in the individual Socrates (Luscombe, 1997: 49).

The question that seems to always arise from this example, is how can Socrates be ‘universal’ while being an individual? In other words, how can one particular being be many other beings? Abelard’s analysis of the “reference of universal posits that words proceed along similar lines to his theory about statements” (LI 19:21–20:14). “There is no such thing as man, either as an immaterial entity, or as a part of each man, which is denoted by the word ‘man’ used universally. But there is a reason, in the nature of things, why the word ‘man’ can be properly

used of any man: namely, that he is a man. Men are alike ‘in the condition of being a man’ (*in statu hominis*). The condition of being a man is the ‘common cause’ of the use of the word ‘man’ - the reason why ‘man’ can be used to describe all men” (Marenbon, 1983: 138).

The dismissal of the traditional problems of universals by Austin and Pears has been accepted as correct (Moreland, 2001), There remain other philosophers who are quite adamant about this dismissal, and these include philosophers like Henry H. Price, who has revived the older view to dispute what they describe as the ‘philosophy of universals’ and the philosophy of ultimate resemblances considered a real dispute not sponsored by the attempt to answer the question which should have never been asked. Hence, Price (1953: 30) contends that:

Our discussion has been long and complicated. What conclusion shall we draw from it? It would seem that there is nothing to choose between these two philosophies, the Philosophy of Universals or characteristics (*universalia in rebus*) on the one hand, and the Philosophy of Ultimate Resemblances on the other. At any rate, it would seem that there is nothing to choose between them so long as they are considered as purely ontological doctrines, which is the way we have been considering them in this chapter. Both seem to cover the facts, though only when both are stated with sufficient care. Moreover, they both cover the same facts. This strongly suggests that they are two different (systematically different) terminologies, two systematically different ways of saying the same thing.

If the analysis of Price is partially close to the truth, then the problem of universal can be taken as one of the most important problems of philosophy. But the solutions that are offered are more important within the tradition of philosophy than as one of the problems that is intrinsically important.

David. M Armstrong (1978: 126) has attempted to describe the theory of universals as “arguably the central problem of ontology”. This is a modern philosopher who has taken the problem of universals seriously. Armstrong saw his proposal as “realist as a hypothesis as an extremely general kind” (1978: 126). Armstrong’s philosophical enquiries about universals are separate from the scientific enquiries on account of the ontological questions. In this regard, Armstrong’s realism differs from the theory proposed by Plato and even Aristotle. To a greater extent, even the medieval Aristotelians, modern philosophers like Austin and Pears, have argued that the problem of universals has lost its relevancy in philosophical discussions. The main reason behind this claim is that “...the scope of the problem has been reduced. It is now

seen primarily as a problem about general words, and about what kinds of things there must be if the use of general words is to be possible” (Milton, 1982: 11). Hence, Milton (1982: 11) argues that “In the twentieth century, the problem of universals has for the most part been regarded (in accordance with changing philosophical fashion) either as a problem about general words or as a problem about general thinking. In Antiquity and in the Middle Ages the problem was seen primarily (though not solely) in connection with the possibility of universal knowledge”. The problem of universals was classified in three categories, namely, realism, conceptualism and nominalism. The remainder of this section attempts to provide a cursory discussion on the theoretical position of these solutions together with their proponents.

1.3.1. Realism

The first theoretical position on the debate of universals is that of the realist that is associated with Plato’s envisaged metaphysics. The central understanding of Plato’s metaphysics contends that universal essences are more real than particular things and individuals are just mere shadows of the truth of the ideal form. Based on this therefore, Plato’s dialogues do not necessarily refer to the term universals as universals, but use the term ‘form’ as universals (Lee, 1974: 321). In Plato’s dialogues it is evident that universal ideas are more real than particulars, as the universal ideas exist within their own real (Lee, 1974: 216-325). This can be seen from the allegory of the cave. In this allegory, “individual things are seen as mere shadows of the reality within the realm of ideas” (Lee, 1974: 216-325). The description of this idea is captured in the allegory as follows. In this allegory:

The prisoners within *the Cave* see only the shadows of real things and mistake those shadows as the real things themselves. However, Plato goes on to describe the process of one of the prisoners being released from his bondage and having been brought to the surface of the cave, is overwhelmed by the light of the sun and must adjust his way of seeing. Through this adjustment of seeing things for the first time *via* the light of the sun, the prisoner is able to see things as they are in themselves, and not as shadows or reflections (*ibid*).

Eric Voegelin elucidates that the reading of the “Platonic conception of Idea was an *eidōs*, a paradigmatic form in separate, transcendental existence” (as cited in Lee, 1974: 219). The debate on whether Plato actually meant or conceived his allegory as a paradigmatic form that embodies a metaphysical theory or just a mere analogy that encamps one essence, with all its

universal idea, actually exists. In Plato and Aristotle, Voegelin supports the interpretation that the allegory is set-up in a manner that shows that the metaphysical theory is constituted by one essence within which all universal ideas actually exist. Martin Heidegger (1998: 155), takes Plato's allegory in a literal sense, by arguing that "the shadows and reflections within the cave are the visible forms of being, whereas the things seen outside of the cave in the light are real essences in themselves in the universal ideas". Heidegger (1998: 156) further explains that "by contrast, the sunlight outside the cave is in no way, a product of human making. In its brightness, things that have grown and are present show themselves immediately without needing adumbrations to represent them".

The idea that is presented by Plato in *The Republic* came to be known as the theory of realism that holds that there is a realm of ideas that is real, and an independently existing area where all particulars are just shadows and just a reflection of their ideal forms. As Voegelin (as cited in Lee, 1974: 328) reiterates, "In fact, neither Plato nor Aristotle has developed systems; they were far too much engrossed with the discovery of new problems". It is quite evident that this position stands in contrast to Heidegger's conception of Plato's allegory as he takes a more literalistic metaphysical approach to Plato.

1.3.2. Nominalism

The second theoretical position of the debate of universals is nominalism. Nominalism was found by Roscelin of Compiègne (1050-1125 a.d.)⁶. Roscelin asserts that the universals "are a mere *flatus vocis* [meaning: *blowing of the voice*]". Thus, for Roscelin, the universal does not exist outside of the mind that engages in language as a signifier of the particulars. Even though Roscelin is seen as the founder or originator of nominalism, the most famous person in the tradition of nominalism is William of Ockham. But the designation of Ockham as a nominalist is questionable as it might not entirely fit into the scope of his work. Paul Vincent Spade (1999:100), despite these disputes of Ockham as a nominalist, argues that "the first thing one learns about William of Ockham's philosophy is usually that he was a 'nominalist.' ... Medieval nominalism, like its modern namesake, took many sometimes-surprising forms".

⁶ William Turner, Jacques Maritain Center, History of Philosophy: Chapter XXIX: Roscelin. <http://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/hop29.htm> (accessed March 12, 2019).

Spade further argues that “at least two distinct themes... have been called nominalism: (1) his rejection of universals ...and (2) his program of what can be called ‘ontological reduction’....” (Spade, 1999: 100). But this distinction does little in clarifying how nominalism is understood in the context of Ockham. Armand Maurer (1993: 63), in his exposition on Ockham’s nominalism, argues that “[Ockham] insists that the worst mistake in philosophy is to hold that, over and above individual things, there are universal realities which, when conceived, are parts of universal propositions. His own position is clear cut, such that universals are nothing but only in terms or names, either spoken, written, or conceived, and that universal concepts themselves are mental names”.

The debate on the universals dominated discourse in the medieval era (Luscombe, 1997). The nominalists do not believe that only names are universals. Nominalist movements originated in the fourteenth century amongst philosophers who regarded themselves as Aristotelians in their inquiry of reality (Luscombe, 1997). The debate about the nature and the existence of universals (also known as the problems of universals) became a dominant medieval problem that originated from Porphyry in his *Isagoge* (Luscombe, 1997); (Russell, 1945). As was the case with Porphyry, Beothius and Abelard, who firstly exhibited the sophisticated insight into the debates of universals, the problems of universals still remained unanswered. This is to suggest the absence of an end to the debate of universals and to some extent, the problems of universals as raised by Aristotle’s writings which never described the closed system of thought that all questions were accounted to. In the light of this, therefore, Aristotle’s metaphysical theory is an unfinished treatise and a collection of incomplete investigations of a series of philosophical problems. Hence, the medieval philosophers were preoccupied with the definite matters that Aristotle left vague or unaddressed.

Scholars have endorsed that nominalism has its clear pronouncement from Ockham’s work. Maurer (1999: 62) on this note explains that “Ockham accepts Aristotle’s designation of a universal as ‘that which is of such a nature as to be predicative of many subjects,’ while an individual is ‘that which is of such a nature as not to be predicative of many subjects’”. According to a philosophical historian, Anders Piltz (1981: 253) “the nominalists accused their opponents, the realists, of maintaining that the goodness of God and the wisdom of God were two things and not one, while the nominalists believed that all that is in God is God”. This is a

crucial point to understanding what is meant by *nominalism*. Heiko A. Oberman (1960: 49) understands that “What we want to do is to go a step further by showing that the theological concept of God is not merely one of many aspects of the inner core of Nominalism, but that its concept of God and Revelation is at the heart of this movement, while logic is its expression in philosophical language”.

William J. Courtenay (2008: 2), a prominent Ockham-scholar, emphasizes in his *Ockham and Ockhamism* that “nominalism was understood as a view that universal concepts had no being or existence outside the mind but were mere names or spoken sounds. Roscelin was generally seen as its earliest and principle defender, while Abelard was a close disciple of Roscelin, and Ockham was the figure who revived nominalism and passed it down to the modern period”. Later, and within the book, Courtenay challenged the traditional understanding of the scholastic view of nominalism, which infers that ‘universal concepts had no being or existence outside the mind’. This was the picture of the nominalists or their key theoretical position in their arguments through the history of philosophy.

However, Courtenay rejects Oberman’s view of medieval nominalism. Oberman asserts instead, that nominalism refers to linguistic truth-centered propositions and is not applicable to the understanding of the ontological status of universals. The proposition is faulty as the sole focus of the medieval era was on universals, and not mere linguistic problems. Courtenay (2008: 19) claims that “these sources [original scholastic texts] led Calvin Normore and myself, independently, to set out two models for the origin and early meaning of nominalism”. Calvin Normore (2019: 202) states that “there is considerable unease within the contemporary scholarly community about what is to be understood by ‘nominalism’ in the Middle Ages”. Normore seems to capture the idea that there are some problems with understanding the ‘nominalism’ of the medieval era within the contemporary scholarly community. This is a problem as it can lead a number of scholars astray in their attempt to understand the foundation and meaning of nominalism as portrayed in the medieval thinkers. Normore (2019: 216) further reiterates that “...medieval nominalism began in a series of worries about the relation of sentences and clauses to the world, worries made central by Abelard, and that it is as much a problem in semantic theory as in metaphysics”. On this note, Normore (2019: 216) seems to suggest that Abelard’s work had “nothing to do with the problem of the universals”. In his

Summa logicae, Ockham states that “truth and falsity are not things really different from a true or false proposition” (as cited in Aertsen, 2012: 517). In the *Summa Logicae*, Ockham clearly states that “no universal as a substance existing outside the mind can be proved in a number of ways....” (*ibid*). In clarification of the meaning of universal Ockham states that:

...it should be noted that there are two kinds of universals. Some things are universal by nature; that is, by nature they are signs predictable of many in the same way that the smoke is by nature a sign of fire; weeping, a sign of grief; and laughter, a sign of internal joy... Other things are universals by convention. Thus, a spoken word, which is numerically one quality, is a universal; it is a sign conventionally appointed for the signification of many things (1974: 78-79).

It seems clear in the light of the quotation above, that Ockham’s metaphysical position requires that there be an essence-based qualification of a universal, even though the notion of universal’s existence is dependent on minds only.

In conclusion, the contemporary philosophers who seem to be the most prominent critics of the traditional understanding of nominalism in terms of the problem of the universals are Courtenay and Normore. Although, the interpretation of the problem of universals through the eyes of nominalism seems to be an ongoing debate, it would be totally a misconception to attribute nominalism to William of Ockham. Robert Pasnau (2011: 84) agrees with Courtenay and Normore’s claim when they argue that “as for the term ‘nominalist,’ although, it had been applied to various logicians back in the twelfth century, its distinct usage in the scholastic context is first found at the start of the fifteenth century.” Pasnau, Courtenay and Normore hinted at the difficulty one can encounter in the course of commenting or analyzing the scholars or thinkers like Abelard, Aquinas and Ockham. The reason for this difficulty is that there is a consensus on the idea whether or not nominalism is applicable to the problems of universals (Courtenay, 2008); (Pasnau, 2011); (Normora, 2019). But another issue is that there is no clear development of any nominalist school within the medieval period under discussion, and this is either quite elusive to find if existent at all.

1.3.3. Conceptualism

The third and final theoretical position in the debate of universals is known as conceptualism. Conceptualism is commonly associated with Peter Abelard, who later was seen as a

predecessor of Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham. The solution offered by conceptualism can tentatively be described as the theoretical position that argues that universals exist within the mind as a concept of what actually subsists and is similar amongst individual particulars. Thus, as much as the universal does exist within the mind, it is still a mental construction of the real likeness of real entities or objects. There is a historical misconception that seems to assume that the conceptualist solution to the problem of universals is just a simple modification of nominalism. The difference in terms of the theoretical commitment between the nominalist and the realist is the existence of the universal idea within the mind. For this distinction to be appreciated at this point, the realists argue that the universal idea exists outside or independently of the mind, while the nominalist contends that the universal idea exists within the mind. The conceptualist on the other hand, affirms one aspect of the nominalist's position but goes a step further. They argue that there is a mental concept which is called the universal, and is within the mind; whereas a pro-nominalist would assert that the universal is a mere name signifying within the mind that is applicable to individuals. There is somewhat of an agreement between the nominalist and the conceptualist on the idea that the universal entities exist within the mind. As noted by Pilatz (1981: 251) "the philosophical contention between the group known as the realists and nominalists only really became heated from the fourteenth century onwards".

1.4. Family of Resemblance and Universalism

I have pointed out above the debate of universals can be traced back to the fathers of philosophy, namely; Plato and Aristotle. Plato, had argued that forms are a real deal of things for the greater scheme of things or nature. However, scholars like Alican and Thesleff (2013: 11) have argued that [Plato's theory of forms] is a "...monistic mode of a hierarchically structured universe comprising interdependent levels of reality". In this monistic mode of levels of reality, exists the dualistic view of forms and particulars or universals and particulars. It is in this theory that Aristotle had vehemently rejected the idea that universals do exist. In his rejection of the existence of the universals, Aristotle argued that the reality that Plato's theory of forms seems to envisage is not entirely accurate interpretation of reality. Reality, as we know it, cannot be dependent on universals but on particular subjects. From these two theoretical positions of Plato and Aristotle, one can suggest that there seems to be a clear distinction between

universals and particulars. In this section, I attempt to establish how the problem of universals, which has to do with the debate between universals and particulars in the Western philosophy, is relevant to the debate between the universalists and particularists in African philosophy.

In my attempt to demonstrate the similarities between the discussion of the two philosophical traditions, I suggest that it would be worthwhile to invoke the principle of ‘family of resemblance’. Wittgenstein contends that ‘family of resemblance’ is a philosophical principle that seeks to secure or connect particular uses of the same word. This then entails that for a debate, discuss or words to secure a status of belonging to the same group there has to be some serious connection amongst them. In light of this, we then need to find the essential core of the meaning of the word to secure the common uses of the word. But this is not the only way with which we can investigate and secure resemblance of words and concepts, this is well captured in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*—In its articulation the condition that needs to be meant for word or concepts to be of the same group—contends that:

We should, instead, travel with the word’s uses through “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing”. Family resemblance also serves to exhibit the lack of boundaries and the distance from exactness that characterize different uses of the same concept⁷.

What is prevalent above, is that there are not only does a word need the condition of possessing similar traits to secure the status of resemblance, but it can travel through the network of overlapping and criss-crossing. In doing so, we can establish family of resemblance. It is from this line of thought that applications of concepts can be deduced, but this is precisely what Wittgenstein now eschews in favor of appeal to similarity of a kind with family resemblance. I do not wish to pursue the merit of theory of ‘family of resemblance’ in philosophical discourse. What I wish to achieve by using ‘family of resemblance’ is invoking instances in which it could be argued that Western and African philosophical discourse debate of universals have the same roots.

Put simply, the relevant question to be asked will be – are there any striking similarities

⁷ CF: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/#LangGameFamiRese> (Accessed on 15 of September 2020).

between the problems of universals as formulated in the Western thought system and the African thought system? This question is relevant as accounting for it might hold promise in the resolution of some of the theoretical issues that arise in the African philosophical debate about its nature. In Western philosophy, the problem of universals worries mostly about the issue of ‘one over many’. As argued above, the legitimate problem as Aristotle puts it, is how can one individual object be many in particular. In this account, Aristotle was actually questioning the form that is a singular thing that causes plural representations of itself in particular objects. It is in the light of this position, that Aristotle seems to have a problem with the universals. Aristotle is of the view that there are no such things as universals. Meanwhile, the debate in African philosophy is formulated, as follows; the nature of philosophy in terms of its methodology and subject matter, has to be universal and should be the same when applied to Western and African thought systems (Van Hook, 1997; see also Li, 1998; Kanu, 2013).

Hence, Bernard Matolino, on this note, argues that “in some quarters here, there exists a domineering view of philosophy as objective and universal in character. Any philosophical activity that fails to live up to the set of standards is dismissed as retaining a non-epistemic/philosophical status” (2015: 433). Hallen and Matolino seem to agree that there are some sets of standards that need to be met for an intellectual activity to attain the status of being philosophical. In other words, there are some characteristics that a particular intellectual activity should meet for that project to attain a philosophical status. In his rejection of African thought as philosophy, Jones (2001) argues that for African thought to be called philosophy it has to meet certain standards. Jones’ response is that for any thought to count as philosophy, it must “necessarily ... (be) universal in scope” (Jones, 2001: 216). This means that philosophy by its very nature, concerns itself with issues that pertain “to all human beings” (*ibid*). In the light of this line of thought, an intellectual activity that does not address itself to questions that concern “all human beings”, will not be a philosophical one (Jones, 2001: 221). Therefore, we can conclude that African philosophy can only count as a *philosophy* insofar as the questions it is dealing with are ultimately, in their scope, universal⁸.

⁸ Van Hook (1997), his African philosophy and the Universalist Thesis, opted to examine the claim that “philosophy is universal” and what does it amount to. The claim seeks to denote the nature of philosophy. It is in this analysis that Van Hook established that there is nothing more that this claim amounts to but is just a mere ‘analysis’. In Van Hook (1997: 394) words, “a universal essence of philosophy seems to [be] unjustified even if

But then what seems to be at the center of both philosophical traditions' discussion? I am of view even if these two traditions seem to be deliberating over different themes, they are both concerned with one and same doctrine, and that is the 'universal'. And not only are they worried about the same doctrine they are even worried about the relationship between the universal and particular. It is not enough to just mention things without properly justify the reasons why these distinct philosophical discussions are talking about the same doctrine. At the heart of the problems of universals, as we see in the debate between Plato and Aristotle, what comes to bear is that the problem they are having is about the ontological status of universals. And it is clear that Aristotle does not believe that they are such things called universals. It is clear so far that what is at stake is the ontological status of 'universals' in Western philosophical discussion of the problems of universals. But on the other hand, in the debate of the nature of African philosophy it is not entirely clear what is at stake unless one looks very closely. All in all, the debate of the nature of African philosophy is skewed towards the universal or the universalists argues that philosophy in terms of its character, method and content is universal. What particularists seems to be aiming at when critiquing the universalists position on the nature of African philosophy is nothing beyond the doctrine of 'universal'.

It is light of this, that there is a need for if the usage of the term universal from Western and African philosophical tradition carries the same meaning as to secure the family of resemblance. In Western tradition 'universal' is defined as thing that is permeant and perfect. And that is also independent of the particular. In African tradition—when closely analyzing the debate of the nature of philosophy—one can arrive at a conclusion that the universalists are of view that 'universal' is independent of the particular. Hence, the universalist like Jones (2001) believes that for a philosophy to attain a status of universal it has to be objective and meet certain characteristics. Both the usage of the term of universal seems to denote the idea that universal by its very nature it is independent of the particular. This therefore serves as my evidence that there is some deep similarity between the usage of the term of universal in Western and African philosophical discussions, even though what we cannot argue that the subject matter differs. But what is common the usage of the term of universal and the meaning

one were to limit oneself to Western philosophy". Hence, he concludes by arguing that "the universalists thesis is either trite (that is uninteresting true) or a mistake). [it] would do well to abandon it" (*ibid*).

that it carries.

All in all, this section had opted to consider the question of making connection between the Western and African usage of the term universal, and it has been argued that the problems of universals and the debate between the universalists and particularists belongs to the same family of resemblance. This was achieved by showing the deeper description of the meaning and usage of the term universal in both the traditions.

1.5. The Problematization of the debate between Universalists and Particularists

The question of whether philosophy as an intellectual activity is universal has been pursued by people of all cultures, is not in doubt. The question although phrased tentatively, led to a number of stars in African philosophical literature from the 80s to date (Hountondji, 1983; see also Anyanwu, 1987; Appiah, 1992; Maurier, 1984; Jones, 2001; Eze, 2001; Matolino, 2015). Hountondji, in his rejection of ethnophilosophy as philosophy, argued that "...philosophy, when qualified by the word 'African', must retain its habitual meaning, or whether the simple addition of an adjective necessarily changes the meaning of the substantive" (1983: 56). In other words, Hountondji's argument is that, on one hand, philosophy as an academic activity should still retain the same meaning and character while qualified with the word 'African'. Hountondji, on this question, answers in the affirmative. He is of view that philosophy must be universal. Hence, on this account, Hountondji argues that "my own view is that this universality must be preserved, not because philosophy must necessarily develop the same themes or even ask the same questions from one country or continent to another" (1983: 56). Peter Bodunrin, similarly, argues that "philosophy...must have the same meaning in all cultures although the subjects that receive priority, and perhaps the method of dealing with them, may be dictated by cultural biases...[C]riticism and argument are essential characteristics of anything which is to pass as philosophy" (1991: 64-65). He further argues that philosophical problems "must have a universal relevance to all men" (Bodunrin, 1991: 78). In contrast, Olabiyi Yai takes a different stance and argues that:

... clearly, if one takes it as given that European philosophy provides the only valid paradigm for philosophy, and if one insists that the hypothetical African philosophy must conform to this paradigm in order to qualify, the answer to the question

[concerning the existence of African philosophy] is known in advance. It is clear, then, that the question could not have been put innocently, nor could the answer be objective (1977: 6).

In the above quotation, Yai expresses some sentiments that there is a problem of conceiving European philosophy as the only valid paradigm. The idea that, put differently, Western thought is the only thought that is valid or that needs to be imposed on other cultures has been the fundamental problem facing the thinkers who either defend the Universalists' thesis or who do not face the criticism. Chukwuozie K. Anyanwu (1987: 237) argues that "it is definitely unphilosophical to subordinate the different visions of all cultures to the European world-vision alone, and this is what the perennial and the universalist philosophers are trying to do, ... I argue that every philosophy is relative to its basic assumptions about the nature of experienced reality as well as epistemological attitude or method".

In view of the forgoing, there seem to be demarcations, and sides have been chosen regarding the character that needs to be exhibited by the nature of philosophy. This, therefore, has led to two contrasting views in the debate whether philosophy is universal as an intellectual activity. Jay M. Van Hook argues that there is a widely held dogma among contemporary African philosophers. This dogma is the "universalist thesis" (Van Hook, 1997: 385). While statements of their thesis vary from person to person, they have a common thread that runs through them which claims that philosophy in methodology and subject matter, has to be universal. The Universalists' thesis main claim is that the concept of philosophy in terms of its methodology and subject matter, is universal and should be the same when applied to Western and African thought systems. Contrarily, the particularists argue that philosophy cannot be the same because of the varied nature among peoples (Ozumba, 1995). The former camp, represented by the works of Wiredu (1998), Appiah (1992), and Hountondji (1983), among others argue that the concept of 'philosophy' in terms of the methodology and subject matter of the discipline should be the same in both the Western and African senses. The latter camp, as seen in the works of Kwame Gyekye (1997), Godfrey Ozumba (1995) and Richard C. Onwuanibe (1984), among others, argue that different cultures have different ways of explaining reality. Hence, Africans must have a philosophy that is essentially different from other philosophies. If preference has to be considered, as Jörg Schroth argues, "universalism seems far better justified than particularism, as the odds are against particularism" (Schroth, 2003: 455). Adeshina

Afolayan, affirms the same point, and argues that the debate on the relations between the universal and the particular in African philosophy has been skewed in favour of the universalists' camps (2009: 363). Van Hook argues that [from a Particularistic perspective] "universalist thesis is seen as an attempt to universalize a Western particularity, and as a concession allowing the West to dictate both rules and agenda of the philosophical enterprise" (Van Hook, 1997: 392). He, further, argues that "the Universalist thesis, however interpreted, [it] contributes nothing to African philosophy and it should be abandoned" (Van Hook, 1997: 385).

These two positions are regarded as mutually exclusive and are both categorized as being incompatible. In the case that this incompatibility is plausible, then the conflict between the conceptions of philosophy as universal rather than cultural will be true. But if this incompatibility does not occur then the entire project will have been an unfruitful exercise. The problem of the universality of philosophy is of paramount importance to African philosophy since it carries significant implications for our humanity. From the above arguments, the concept of philosophy as a universal-particular dilemma can be characterized as a tension between the Universalists and Particularists. This tension between the two philosophical positions raises fundamental questions for instance, is philosophy universal? Are there universals? Is the conflict between the Universalists and Particularists real? Or is the incompatibility between the Universalists and Particularists real?

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter aimed at providing a basis for the current thesis that concerns itself with the debate between the Universalists and Particularists in African philosophy. This chapter set out to evaluate the philosophical problem of universalism and suggested that the problems of universals or universalism have persisted over some time. In other words, it can be said that the debate between the two philosophical extremes has existed since the inception of philosophy. The debate of the universals and particulars, in this chapter, has been traced back to the fathers of philosophy, namely, Plato and Aristotle in their debates of forms. It is in these discussions that the debate of forms and particulars or universals and particulars actually originated. Plato proposed a dualism of form and particular, a theory of rigid idealism that

posits essences or forms as the only reality and treats everything else as unreal and reduced the material world to a mere appearance. Plato's theory of forms contends that all material objects are based on universal and immutable concepts that are forms, and that for such an object to exist, it must share or participate in forms. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle argues that the reality that Plato envisaged is not entirely accurate, as reality does not depend on universal abstracts, it is dependent on particular substances of the physical things. This chapter further considered the development of the debate of universals as it was traced to the medieval era. But the *medieval* problem of universals was distinct from Plato's theory of forms from a logical point of view, even though it was historically related to the ancient problems. It has been argued that the problem of universals was resuscitated by Porphyry in his *Isagoge*. The solution of the problem of universals in the medieval era came to be known as realism, conceptualism and nominalism.

Fundamentally, the realist position is associated with Plato's envisaged metaphysics. The central understanding of Plato's metaphysics contends that universal essences are more real than particular things, and individuals are just mere shadows of the truth of the ideal form. The realists argue that the universal idea exists outside or independently of the mind. While the nominalist contends that the universal idea exists within the mind. The conceptualists, on the other hand, affirm one fiber of nominalist's position but go a step further. They argue that there is a mental concept too, which is called the universal, within the mind; whereas a pro nominalist asserts that the universal is a mere name signification within the mind that is applicable to individuals. In the analysis of the problem of universals associated with the Western tradition it has been found that there are two senses in the word universal that had been used in philosophy.

The first sense of the usage of the word, in Western literature, is that of a *common colour*. The second sense of universals lacks objectivity. The two senses of the usage of the word universals, in Western literature, paved a path into the question of similarity of the problems of universals and the debate of Universalists vis-à-vis the Particularists in African philosophy. This chapter, on this account, has established and argued that there is somewhat of a similarity between the two debates. It is evident that at the center of the debate of the problems of universals and the debate between Universalists vis-a-vis the Particularists in African

philosophy is the idea of general thinking. Even though, their subject matter might differ, they are all concerned with the relationship between universals and particulars. Having established the connection between the Western problem of universals and the African debate between the universalists and particularists, my next chapter seeks to consider the question what is the debate between the universalists and particularists about? As this debate is broad it cuts across a number of periods, so this chapter will focus on the classical debate between the universalists and the particularists so as to provide a conducive picture of the debate.

Chapter Two

The Classical debate between the Universalists and Particularists in African Philosophy

2. Introduction

The past three decades in African philosophy had been tainted with the engagement of two intertwined questions; (1), the nature of African philosophy and (2), the question whether African philosophy exists. These debates came to be known as the “great debate” (Nwala, 2007: 37). According to Timothy Nwala (2007: 37), this debate is “...because of the consummate passion, rigor, extensive interest generated and a vast amount of literature that poured out in the process”. Fundamentally, these debates had started from the 1970s till the close of the 1990s, and this is visible from works of Kwasi Wiredu (1980), Pauline Hountondji (1983), K.C Anyanwu (1987), Henry Odera Oruka (1975), Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992), Peter Bodunrin (1984), and others. This debate aroused a wider range of interest among philosophy scholars who were dominantly polarized by the two opposing positions: those who insisted that African philosophy exists and those who denied the existence of African philosophy. The key questions that were at the center of the debate include: What is African philosophy? What body of knowledge qualifies as the proper content of the ‘Philosophy’ in African philosophy?

Kwame Gyekye (1987: x) argues that the debate of the nature of African philosophy has preoccupied the “...minds of contemporary African philosophers...” According to Gyekye, there are two main reasons. Firstly, he argues that “...there was no existing tradition of written philosophy not only to not only guide their perceptions of the nature of African philosophy but also to constitute a coherent and viable conceptual and normative framework that they could explore and develop” (1987: x). It is evident, therefore, that the questions arose around the unwritten work in the discourses of African philosophy in the light of some comments made by Western scholars. Secondly, he argues that there is an issue with the fact that most African philosophers have “...received their philosophical training mostly in Western countries, such as Britain, France, and the United States, or based largely on the education systems of these

countries. As a result, contemporary African philosophers are more likely than not in fact, predisposed to be greatly influenced by that training in their conceptions of the nature of African philosophy” (Gyekye, 1987: x). The danger of this position is that most of these Philosophy scholars contend that their worldview and understanding of philosophy would shape their experience regarding the nature of African philosophy. Hence, their judgement of what the nature of philosophy could be in terms of the method and content will be - given this line of thought - measured by the Western framework and to a greater extent, would be forged by Western mode of thought.

This chapter aims to provide a critical evaluation of the analysis of the great debate of the nature of African philosophy. It will be worthwhile to provide a clear picture of the arguments that had been advanced by debate between the universalists and the particularists. As this study, is centered on the debate between the universalists and the particularists in African philosophy I deem it worthwhile to start at the beginning so as to provide a clear picture on how the things started and developed until to the current situation. This chapter will exhaustively and considerably attempt to shed some light on the question of what may count as philosophy and the sense in which the philosophy scholars have attempted to account for the activity of doing philosophy in our context.

This chapter is structured as follows; in the first section it will extensively look at the great debate in African philosophy concerning the nature of African philosophy. It will also attempt to show some of the fundamental differences that exist between the philosophy scholars on the nature of African philosophy. The differences amongst the scholars of philosophy do not necessarily exist between those philosophers who take different positions on the method and the subject matter of philosophy but even those who belongs to the same philosophical camp. Hence, the researcher will argue that there are differences that exist even within the same camp. In doing so, I will also entertain the idea of which way of doing philosophy as a field of inquiry is more conducive to a study.

2.1. The Great Debate

In this section, I seek to offer an overview of the debate on the question of African philosophy. Arinze C. Agbanusi argues that this debate, as alluded to above, “kicked off in the early

seventies at the philosophy department of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) [led] by J.O Sodipo” (2016: 173). Sodipo was an editor of *Second Order, An African Journal of Philosophy* that began in 1972. The fundamental intention of this Journal was to examine the structural nature of the ‘traditional African thought’. According to Agbanusi (2016: 173), the great debate stemmed from this Journal. A great deal of interest arose amongst philosophers some of whom were Africans and others non-African in origin. The debate was separated into two oppositional camps - those who argue that there is African philosophy; and the oppositional camp which argues that there is no African philosophy. The aim of this section therefore is to provide an overview of the Great Debate, in more than one sphere; firstly, it will show some of the philosophy scholars who have argued that African philosophy does not exist, and secondly, it will spend more time demonstrating some of the distinctions that exist within those philosophy scholars who argue that African philosophy does exist or that there is a possibility of African philosophy. This study intends to articulate their differences that are mostly around the issue of what can actually count as African philosophy. The basic question that had informed the debate amongst these scholars can be captured as follows: 1) what body of knowledge can qualify as the proper ‘philosophy’ in African philosophy? 2) Is there a body of knowledge which can qualify as African philosophy? If yes what is it?

2.1.1. Two distinct Positions amongst philosophers who agree that African philosophy exists

The main issue in the debate whether African philosophy exists is whether there are materials referred to as African philosophy which can actually qualify as philosophy. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992: 86) sarcastically suggests that “a cookbook philosophy might be better not be called ‘the philosophy of cooking’, but it might be a good cookbook nevertheless...instead [we need to examine]...the range of things that have come to be called ‘African philosophy’ and ask which of these activities are worthwhile or interesting - and in what ways”. There are a range of texts that focused on African traditional thought which could be either metaphysics, epistemology, or political philosophy. The first work that focused on metaphysics is; *Bantu Philosophy* by Placid Tempels, *African Religions, and Philosophy* by John Mbiti. The second works that focused on epistemology is; *Yoruba Epistemology* by J.O Sodipo and B. Hallen.

The third works that focused on political are the works of Leopold Sedar Senghor, Julius Nyerere, and Kwame Nkrumah. These works raised a debate that lasted for over three decades.

In this debate, it worth repeating that philosophy scholars were separated into two philosophical positions. According to Birt (1991: 95), “the question of African philosophy is largely an extension of the question ‘what is philosophy?’ If there is a disagreement on the latter question, there is naturally some contention over the former”. He further argues that the “debate over the importance of literacy to philosophical discourse or philosophical traditions, which is natural, given the absence of literate discourse in traditional Africa” (Birt, 1991: 95). The distinction between those philosophers who argue that African philosophy exists or does not exist seems very easy to identify. There is another unclear distinction amongst the Philosophy scholars who have argued that African philosophy does actually exist. Now how can we distinguish these somewhat similar but different philosophical positions on the nature of African philosophy? These Philosophy scholars, even though they agree that African philosophy exists, differ on what actually qualifies as African philosophy, and what would not undermine the philosophical standard. Even though the debate had been polarized by the antagonistic groups of those who argue that African philosophy exists, or it does not exist, it is quite visible that the question itself was mostly not phrased in that manner. The key question that most of the Philosophy scholars were attempting to account for, was the question of what can count as African philosophy. In response to this question, two antagonistic groups emerged, and these include those who argue that traditional ethnophilosophy should count as philosophy and others who argued that ethnophilosophy should not be taken as philosophy. In a simple sense, there are those Philosophy scholars who agree and argue that certain intellectual activities that are passed as philosophy do not meet the necessary criteria or qualify to be called Philosophy. It would be worthwhile to make this distinction clear, to be able to present the landscape of the African philosophical terrain of the great debate in a somewhat more detailed manner where possible. W.A. Hart contends that the debate had to do with:

...the question of whether African thought as it exists in Africa is the same sort of thing with thought as understood by the Western Philosopher and we Europeans or educated Africans who share his culture (as cited in Nwala 1992, p. 19).

Based on this presentation of the question, it is not surprising that Hart answers in the negative to the question. Naturally, no one would expect African thought to be exactly the same sort of thing as European thought. Naturally African thought differs from European culture. Hart's presentation betrays the erroneous impression that the debate on African philosophy is meant to address the question of whether or not African thought is exactly the same sort of thing as European thought. As already mentioned above, that Hart seemed to have missed the whole point of the argument from the outset, but his miscomprehension of the point had been influenced by W.E. Ruch's, who has answered the question of 'is there African philosophy?' by arguing that "there is nothing called African philosophy but cultural anthropology" (cited in Nwala, 1992: 3).

2.1.1.1. The Universalists approach to African Philosophy

P. O. Bodunrin opened the debate in Richard Wright's *Anthology of African Philosophy: An Introduction*. The question that Bodunrin seeks to answer relates to 'the question of African philosophy'. At the heart of the question is the idea of "[reflecting] different understanding of the meanings of philosophy itself" (Bodunrin, 1991: 65). Bodunrin argues that African philosophy does exist. So, in a simple sense, in the question of whether African philosophy exists or not, Bodunrin answers in the affirmative. Birt (1991) argues that there was a general tendency to answer in the affirmative to the question of whether African philosophy exists. Bodunrin appears skeptical, even though, he does not entirely dismiss the affirmative answer on the question of what counts as African philosophy. Birt, for his part, "...cautions against a too ready acceptance of them in such an uncritical spirit as would conceal the problematic character of both question and answer" (1991: 96). Bodunrin (1991) seems to suggest that the most relevant answers to the question of African philosophy are problematic due to the divergent views amongst the philosophers on the nature and meaning of philosophy. Jonathan O. Chimakonam observes that "[Bodunrin]...believes the answers to the questions shall constitute the criteria for African philosophy" (2015: 38). However, Bodunrin seemed not to be satisfied with the blueprint that was prescribed by Hountondji. As for Bodunrin, this prescribed blueprint of how one material can count or qualify as African philosophy was too simplistic. There should be clear and deeper reasons why an intellectual activity counts as African philosophy. In Bodunrin words:

I now think that our not wholly terminological dispute as to what is and what is not to count as African philosophy cannot be settled without answering some important questions. Some of these questions are: what exactly are African philosophers trying to do, namely, what challenges are they trying to meet? What is the proper answer to these challenges? In other words, what would constitute an appropriate answer to the problems African philosophers are trying to solve? What is the difference between a piece of philosophical discourse and discourse in some other discipline? What is it for a given idea or philosophy to be correctly definable as African philosophy? (1991: 65-66).

Even though Bodunrin seems to be reflecting on the question of what counts as African philosophy, the problem that arises is that he does not clearly answer these questions so as to define his position and views regarding the criteria to meet before it qualifies as African philosophy. However, he subscribed to the professional school or trends⁹. As a matter of fact, professional trends reject ethnophilosophy as a set approach to African philosophy. Professional philosophers concur that myths, folklore, and traditional world views of Africa do not constitute philosophy. The reason for this is that it has to meet a standard of being 'universal' criterion of philosophy. But if it does not meet this standard, it fails as African philosophy.

As a professional philosopher, Bodunrin will naturally reject ethnophilosophy as one of the approaches to African philosophy or as one of the criteria that needs to be met for a body of material to be counted as African philosophy. So, what is at hand, in view of this line of thought, is that there was a desire for philosophy scholars to make a clear distinction of what counts as philosophy as opposed to what is not philosophy. Hence, Birt observes that Bodunrin, "...repeatedly emphasizes [on] the importance of respecting the contemporary distinctions among disciplines" (1991: 97). Bodunrin criticisms of ethnophilosophy and to some extent, sage philosophy claims that there are two disciplines that show some Africanity within their character, but the latter has the potential of being rational and coherent world views (1991). However, he is of view that, not every rational and coherent world view is philosophical in nature, i.e, Mythology and mathematics (Bodunrin, 1984: 3). In his words, "the works of

⁹ A Kenyan philosopher, Henry Order Orika (1984) is credited with identifying trends or school of thought in what African philosophy could be, namely, ethnophilosophy, sage philosophy, nationalist-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy. He first suggested the first four and later added the last two, namely, hermeneutic and artistic philosophy.

ethnophilosophy and philosophical sagacity bear perhaps a greater resemblance to anthropology than to philosophy” (Bodunrin, 1984: 4). But Bodunrin in his analysis of what counts as philosophy, dismisses ethnophilosophy, and contends that he was just skeptical of philosophical sagacity. Likewise, Bodunrin believes that ‘philosophy begins in wonder’ (1984: 3). So, in essence, philosophy does not begin until one starts to reflect on one's beliefs (Bodunrin, 1984: 10).

Bodunrin's analysis of what can count as philosophy is starting to suggest some of the criteria that can be deemed philosophy material in its strict sense. In line with his commitments, the key criteria of philosophy such as - consciousness, creative discursiveness and critical self-reflection were inclined towards his skepticism of philosophical sagacity. Ethnophilosophy sees African philosophy as those traditional myths, proverbs, folklore, religious beliefs that promote cultural materials without a true self-reflection and true conscious discursiveness process. In view of this, he believes that “philosophy will be properly studied...through the examination of the thoughts of individuals” (Bodunrin, 1984: 11). It is not surprising for Bodunrin to make this claim that a proper study of philosophy is such that in nature, it is individual thought processes that are essential for a material to be qualified as a philosophy in its true sense. Hountondji expresses similar sentiments about this character of philosophy. Hountondji in his attempt to demonstrate how philosophy as a discipline is discursive in nature, contends that it indirectly resonates with the assumption that philosophy is an individual exercise where individual thoughts are purely exhibited. Hountondji, while trying to make this point clear, argues that:

It is as an individual that I take part in this debate, and in doing so I take part in the gradual unveiling of a truth that is not mine but everyone's, the outcome of the confrontation of all individual thoughts which constitute an unending collective search (Hountondji, 1983: 72).

The participation of an individual in the philosophical debate starts to denote some interesting phenomena about the nature of philosophy. It seems inevitable that philosophy is an individual exercise, and this is the essential nature of philosophy. Hence, Hountondji suggests that the very nature of philosophy “...lies in the to and fro free discussion, without which there is no philosophy” (1983: 72). He further argues that philosophy historically is a closed system that exhibits antagonisms that go from one generation to the next generation that thinkers

participate in with sole responsibility of advancing and defending their theoretical commitments.

Hountondji's response to the question of African philosophy is yes. For him, "African philosophy is literature being produced by Africans dealing with philosophical problems related to the rational status of bodies of knowledge the nature of rationality itself" (Hountondji, 1983: 53). He argues that what makes philosophy 'African' is because, it has been produced by Africans (Hountondji, 1983: 64). He further claims that African philosophy is a philosophy that is done by Africans. He offers an example of works of German philosophers like Immanuel Kant. Consequently, he asks a question, - is this really African philosophy? Like, in the case of William Amo who wrote his dissertation in Germany. In this regard, Hountondji argues that this could not be seen as African in origin (1983: 128). His regret is that a thinker like Amo belonged 'entirely to a *non-African theoretical tradition.*' (Hountondji, 1983: 129-30). In other words, his writing could only insert itself into a cultural conversation other than his own.

Hountondji argues that the literature on African philosophy carries some fundamental confusion regarding the term philosophy. According to Hountondji (1983), there is a confusion between a vulgar use of the term philosophy and philosophy in a strictly theoretical use of the term. Philosophy, in the first place, refers to any kind of reasonably coherent body of knowledge that governs any daily practices. In this sense, everyone is a potential philosopher, and every society may be said to have a philosophy as its basis. In this sense, philosophy can be seen to be synonymous to collective philosophy that informs the way of life of a particular group.

Hountondji, on the idea of what counts as African philosophy, further argues that "... 'by African philosophy' I mean a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans themselves and described as philosophical by their authors themselves" (1983: 33). In contrast, Appiah disagrees and clearly rejects this line of thought. For Appiah, the idea that philosophers have to name what philosophy is, is itself problematic, as it has the potential of allowing certain books to pass as philosophy, while they are not philosophical in nature. Appiah (1992: 86), sarcastically suggests that "a cookbook might be better not be called "the philosophy of

cooking”, but it might be a good cookbook, nevertheless. According to him, ...instead [we need to examine]...the range of things that have come to be called ‘African philosophy’ and ask which of these activities are worthwhile or interesting—and in what ways”.

In his work “*African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*” (1983), Hountondji had two principal aims; firstly, to debunk ethnophilosophy as philosophy *qua* philosophy. Secondly, to formulate an (an African) philosophy that is independent of Western influence. It is quite interesting to pose the question of whether Hountondji actually did succeed in formulating such a philosophy which surpasses the Western influence. Hence, in view of this, one can assume that he yearned to introduce an (African) philosophy that is different from all his predecessors’. Hountondji's motive for a new concept or understanding of philosophy in the African context was to substitute the dominant view held by his own predecessors. His predecessors believed that philosophy can be captured by theories of collectiveness or to some extent, communal world-views. For example, the Belgian priest Placide Tempels’ describes “Bantu Philosophy” as a classical example of such a case where the author regarded a collective world-view as philosophy. In this book, Tempels seems to account to the colonial masters that the natives that are said to be “primitive” possess a logical system. Hountondji is of the view that, we need to promote a positive idea of our Africanness, in contrast to the negative ideas concerning Africans and their sense of being during the colonial period.

For Hountondji, philosophy begins when the discursive discipline begins. On the idea of discursiveness, he writes:

Philosophy never stops; its very existence lies in the to and fro of free discussion, without which there is no philosophy. It is not a closed system but a history, a debate that goes on from generation to generation, in which every thinker, every author, engages in total responsibility: I know I am responsible for what I say, for the theories I put forward...A philosophical...work...is intelligible only as a moment in a debate that sustains and transcends it. It always refers to antecedent positions, either to refute them or to confirm and enrich them. It takes on meaning only in relation to that history, in relation to the term of an ever-changing debate in which the sole stable element is the constant reference to one self-same object, to one sphere of experience, the characterization of which, incidentally, it itself part of evolution (Hountondji, 1983: 72-83).

In view of this explanation, an authentic philosophical tradition depicts the nature of discursiveness, such that it affirms the idea of discursivity that seems to be peculiar amongst

philosophical traditions whether in Western, Indian, Asian or American countries. From Hountondji's argument, the idea of discursivity is universal in the nature of philosophy. So, it is not wrong to claim that philosophy is a discursive discipline, that “without which there is no philosophy” (Hountondji, 1983: 72).

In Hountondji's words:

I am responsible for them in the literal sense of the word because I must always be prepared to answer for them; I must be ready to justify them, to attest to their validity. It is as an individual that I take part in this debate, and in doing so I take part in the gradual unveiling of a truth that is not mine but everyone's, the outcome of the confrontation of all individual thoughts which constitutes an unending collective search (1983: 72).

In this regard, philosophy has a nature that is similar to science. Hountondji's philosophy refers to a discipline that is more scientific than just a literary exercise. In a more subtle way, philosophy is closer to mathematical and experimental sciences than it is to the arts. Philosophy, in Hountondji's words, “is a theoretical discipline and therefore belongs to the same genus as algebra, geometry, mechanics, linguistics, etc” (1983: 49).

Thus, ethno-philosophy is a project of unraveling and systematizing the traditional African people. For Bodunrin, “ethnophilosophy refers to works of anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers” that can be interpreted as a “collective world view of African peoples, their myths and folk wisdom” as constitutive of African philosophy (1984: 1). In a similar vein, Tsenay Serequeberhan, argues that ethnophilosophy can be characterized as the beginning of African philosophy. Consequently, ethnophilosophy is the study of cultural African thought and the African way of life with a view to attempting to understand how they interpret reality. The first ethnophilosophical work is attributed to Placide Tempels' work *Bantu Philosophy*.

Similarly, Hountondji argues that:

This Belgian missionary's Bantu Philosophy still passes today, in the eyes of some, for the classic of "African philosophy". In fact, it is an ethnological work with philosophical pretensions, or more simply, if I may coin the word [as] ethnophilosophy...

Africans are, as usual, excluded from the discussion, and *Bantu Philosophy* is a mere pretext for learned disquisitions among Europeans. The black man continues to be

the very opposite of an interlocutor; he remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse (1973: 51).

Although, it is an unchallenged fact that Bantu Philosophy is first ethnophilosophical work, there are several criticisms that are levelled against the project itself. Ethnophilosophy speaks of themes like Bantu philosophy, Akan philosophy, Dogon philosophy, and these themes start to consider some collective (to some extent tribal) world views. The sources of material of this philosophy can be traced in the past, in fact, during the pre-colonial era. Since the sources do not, obviously, present their philosophies, it is the task of philosophers or even academics and scholars to analyze, formulate, and systematize the entire culture. In essence, Oruka (1991: 52) refers to the philosophy as *culture* philosophy. The reason for this conviction, I suspect, was informed by the fact that the first ethnophilosophers did not take African philosophy as “logically argued thoughts of [an] individuals” (Bodunrin, 1984: 1), but, as the body of communal thought.

Hountondji marshaled a sharp and effective criticism against Tempels' works which described the worldviews based on the data about the lived experiences of the Bantu people. In his criticism, Hountondji seems to appeal to the wrong conception that can be interpreted as Racism from the Work of ethnographers like Lucian Levy-Bruhl. Levy-Bruhl (1923) is one of the scholars who argued that Africans have no rational capacity. Hountondji's criticism of Tempels was not to debunk African philosophy but to show that Tempels' work does not meet the standard of doing philosophy in a strict sense. His task was to remedy the phenomena that were created by Scholars like Levy-Bruhl.

Tempels seems, to some extent, to follow the same course as Hountondji. This statement is not to be read as a way of attempting to ignore Tempels and Hountondji works. The researcher's opinion here is to simply say that there are some clear similarities between Hountondji and Tempels, regarding their attempt to show that Africans are rational like all other human beings. Tempels in his task, that was attempting to show his audience that African people, Bantu people to be specific, have some system of thought. Hence, he suggested the hierarchical mode of thought. It seems apt to say that Tempels' book '*Bantu philosophy*' targeted colonizers and the missionaries. Hountondji argues that a chapter in the

book entitled '*Bantu philosophy and our mission to civilize*', clearly shows that the black person is not a participant in that conversation but is under some private investigation (2003: 126). On this account, I believe it is arguable that Hountondji's criticisms of Tempels are not accurate.

This is not to exonerate the philosophical bankruptcy of Tempels' work. In fact, Hountondji's criticism over ethnophilosophy seems accurate. Hountondji accuses ethnophilosophy as being a (philosophy)¹⁰ that is unphilosophical. Hence, it will be quite easy for Hountondji to make a claim that ethnophilosophy is not philosophy in the strict sense of the word. But on a different note, Hountondji reiterates that if our understanding of African philosophy flags the ethnophilosophical approach and nature, then there is some "...flagrant misconception" (1983: 48). The reason for this, according to Hountondji, is that the origins of ethnophilosophy in African are mythical. The origin of the myth can be traced back to the father of ethnophilosophy, Tempels. The myth that underlies ethnophilosophical reports maintains that regarding the African people there is some sense of unanimity that exists in the mode of thought. This is one aspect about the issue of ethnophilosophy. On the other hand, as I have hinted above, there is an issue of ethnophilosophy being an imposition on African reality. On the question of whether philosophy has to retain its habitual meaning if it is qualified by the term "African" as raised by Hountondji, it is necessary to examine the claims made by ethnophilosophers, as I have indicated immediately above. Additionally, Hountondji, asks the question - does philosophy, when qualified with the word "African", retain the same habitual meaning or necessarily change the meaning of its substantive content and method? (1996: 56). In responding, Hountondji claims that the universality of the word philosophy goes beyond its geographical locations (*ibid*). He writes thus:

This universality must be preserved - not because philosophy must necessarily develop the same themes or even ask the same questions from one country or continent to another, but because these differences of content which, as such, Ethno-

¹⁰ My usage of brackets in the term philosophy, here, is in a technical way as to capture the line of thought of Hountondji. Hountondji claims that ethnophilosophy is not a philosophy or it has not exhibited the philosophical traits and characteristics that can be used to validate it as philosophy account to the standard that Hountondji has set. Which according to Hountondji, "...one thing is certain: philosophy is a theoretical discipline and therefore belongs to the same genus ad algebra, geometry, mechanics, linguistics, etc" (Hountondji, 1983: 47).

philosophy is Rational: A Reply to Two Famous Critics refer back to the essential unity of a single discipline, of a single style of inquiry (Hountondji 1983, 56).

What Hountondji seeks to challenge is the myth that universality of philosophy is geographically bound. Hence, for him even if philosophy can develop themes that are context bounded there is a need for the preservation of its universality.

Ethnophilosophers, according to Hountondji, are under an assumption that African societies are primitive societies which possess a collective system of beliefs. Such beliefs are purely inaccurate of the true nature of things in African societies. Thus, unity of such beliefs amongst Africans, as Hountondji (1983) puts it, is a myth or an illusion. Appiah makes a contribution to the issue of unanimity. Appiah, like Hountondji, argues that whatsoever Africans do not share in common culture, language and religion (1992: 26). It is with great suspicion that one must regard ethnophilosophers who are too quick to present an African view as if there were a collective view of Africans. Against this view, Appiah writes about this idea of collective views saying we do not share “common traditional culture, common languages, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary” (1992: 26. In the light of this view “unanimism is not entitled to... its fundamental presupposition” (*ibid*).

Furthermore, Hountondji takes ethnophilosophy as a study that is devoid of any meaningful philosophy. This view is informed by his universalistic understanding of philosophy which he claims is a discipline that is methodical, rational and critical. About ethnophilosophers, Hountondji argues that:

While they were looking for philosophy in a place where it could never be found, even in the collective unconsciousness of African peoples, in the silent folds of their explicit discourse-ethnophilosophers never questioned the nature and theoretical status of their own analyses (1983: 63).

Hountondji is also of the view that “ethnophilosophy is a pre-philosophy mistaking itself for a metaphilosophy¹¹, a philosophy which, instead of presenting its own rational justification, shelters lazily behind the authority of tradition and projects its own theses and beliefs onto

¹¹ According to Hountondji (1983:63), Metaphilosophy means that philosophy can develop only by reflecting on its history. It also means that all new thinkers must be fed on the doctrines of their predecessors...so to enrich the historical heritage available in their own time.

that tradition” (1983: 63).

Hountondji and Appiah have argued that ethnophilosophy is a project of seeking to advocate for black difference and exhibit their systematic thought to the whole world. In other words, Appiah views ethnophilosophy as a form of black philosophy, and also argues that such a philosophy has to be rejected. The reason, according to Appiah, is that this type of philosophy “...depends on the essentially racist presuppositions of the White philosophy whose antithesis it is. Ethnocentrism—which is an unimaginative attitude to one’s culture - is in danger of falling into racism, which is an absurd attitude to the color of someone else’s skin” (1992: 92).

Similarly, Hountondji argues that:

Theirs is clearly a re-argued action. The quest for is always bound up with a desire to show off. It has meaning only in relation to the "Other", from whom one wishes to distinguish oneself at all costs. This is an ambiguous relationship, in as much as the assertion of one's difference goes hand in hand with a passionate urge to have it recognized by the "Other". As this recognition is usually long coming, the desire of the subject, caught in his/her own trap, grows increasingly hollow until it is completely alienated in a restless craving for the slightest gesture, the most cursory glance from the Other (2003: 132).

It is clear that the motivation of ethnophilosophy is not rooted in epistemic or motivated by the search for truth. But its sole motivation lies with the idea of African self-identity and the desire to assert diversity. Hountondji, amongst many scholars, is a leading theoretical critique of ethnophilosophy. Appiah, similarly, asserts that ethnophilosophy is “predicated on two major assumptions. The first, which...Hountondji has dubbed “unanimism”, is the factual assumption...The second is the evaluative assumption that the recovery of this tradition is worthwhile” (1992: 95). In ethnophilosophical unanimism, according to Hountondji’s conception, there is a defect of arguing for a collective view; the quite absurd issue is that from the ethnophilosophical point of view, philosophy was a function of collective consciousness, and in doing so, it has rendered individual consciousness and reflections meaningless. That, according to Hountondji's view, should be the springboard for the emergence of a responsible discourse and of authentic philosophizing. Hence, Hountondji’s view that regards philosophy as a discursive activity of individuals, not as a collective consciousness. This is what he takes as the true sense of philosophy.

Lucius Outlaw takes a very interesting and different approach in the great debate. In his 'African Philosophy: Deconstructive and Reconstructive Challenges', instead of answering the question of African philosophy, Outlaw asks the question why there is a need for this question about African philosophy at all. Beyond this, Outlaw thinks that "there are ways by which the question of 'African philosophy' challenges the very idea of Philosophy as it has been construed by the dominant voices narrating the history and setting the agenda of philosophy in the West" (Outlaw, 1987: 11). He argues that the issues that are involved in the question of African philosophy are "mostly immediately concerned with the disciplinary matters" (Outlaw, 1987: 11). He further notes that the pressing and deeper issue "...is a struggle over the meaning of man and civilized human" (*ibid*). The emergence of African philosophy as an idea or a discipline was to "displace the dominant Greco-Eurocentric notions of 'man' and 'civilized human' by expanding their denotative ranges and...or by redefining these notions" (Outlaw, 1987: 12). In the light of this line of thought, African philosophy is critical of the "(self) image of Greco- Roman/European rational man, which has been raised to the level of a paradigm through the efforts of dominant figures in European philosophy "to identify the human essence" (Outlaw, 1987: 13). The source of this self-image starts from the beginning of philosophical exercises from Plato and Aristotle. According to Outlaw, it is a philosophy that "appointed itself the sole custodian and guardian of this self-image, a self-image infected with logocentrism or (in Foucault's terms) 'logophilia'" (1987: 13-14).

Outlaw suggests that African philosophy's deconstructive challenge to Western thought is a challenge to the imperialism. It further challenges the idea of the logocentric "rational male" that is embedded in European philosophical identity. Even though the issues of tests, content, and methodology are amongst the problems that African philosophy is facing, the "deeper and more pressing question" that is at the center of the question of African philosophy, as mentioned above, is the question of whether 'Africans are "...fully human...as defined by the reigning Greek-cum-European paradigm"' (Outlaw, 1987: 19). Outlaw's position in the debate is quite interesting because beside responding to the question in affirmation or negation, he outrightly dismisses the question and shows that there is no need to ask the question whether African philosophy actually exists. Asking this question has potentially been misunderstood as can be noticed above in the place of Hart who has entirely missed the key question at hand.

Outlaw is of view that this question will always raise the political agenda of the debate. Outlaw suggests that there is a need for a displacement of Eurocentric notions of man and human by “expanding their denotative ranges” or “redefining the notions” (1987: 18). Now, will this expansion be inclusive enough to include African people within the Western paradigm? In responding to this question, Birt commented that “...many African philosophers seem uncritically committed to their specific Western-school models; it is hard to imagine them as radical philosophic pioneers. Hence, one wonders whether the radical deconstructive project of Outlaw is an actual state of affairs within African philosophy or vision, a mission to be actualized” (1991: 105).

Henri Maurier’s response to the question of the existence of African philosophy is no. But he was a bit optimistic about the prospect of African philosophy to take shape in the future. Hence, Maurier argues that there have been some partially groundbreaking works that have been done within this philosophical enterprise but “real enterprise has not yet gotten off the ground” (Maurier, 1984: 25). The question that arises then is why is this the case? Why is African philosophy still not yet off the ground as a philosophical enterprise that can be taken on the same level as a Western philosophical enterprise? Maurier provides an un-hesitated response to this question. According to Maurier, “the necessary conditions for, first, a philosophy and, then, for an African philosophy have not yet been met” (1984: 25). It seems as though, according to Maurier’s view, at this stage of African philosophy as he observed it, the available material of that time about African philosophy couldn't have existed. Furthermore, and in line with Maurier's conception of things, for African philosophy to exist or to be given the status of a philosophical enterprise, it should have met a particular conception of a meaning of philosophy. For example, Bodunrin believes that philosophy must be rigorous and systematic. These sentiments are shared by Maurier, who argued that “everyone would agree that philosophy as a discipline is reflective, rational and systematic” (Maurier, 1984: 26). These claims are not surprising as they instigate a particular frame of mind that was perpetuated by a number of Anthropologists. These scholars believe that there is nothing in Africa that is adequate to meet the requirements of philosophy.

Maurier shares similar views, that Philosophical research in African does not adequately meet these requirements (Maurier, 1984). One of the undisputed facts about Philosophy is that it is

a rational discipline. In essence, it certainly does not simply present myth, legend, or folklore as if they were of themselves philosophically significant. In a simple sense, Philosophy "works over and elaborates concepts extracted from the core of myth and magic, or at least tries to do so" (Maurier, 1984: 26). Maurier substantiates his claims by using Bantu Philosophy of Father Placide Tempels and Alexis Kagame. He argues that these works are mostly classified as ethnophilosophical. He further argues that "Bantu philosophy is not philosophy, because "it takes one notion or another from the level of ordinary language, sayings or common beliefs" (Maurier, 1984: 26). For Maurier, all philosophy "...should be a thorough and rational critique of concepts in general use" (1984: 26). In the light of the presentation of the position that I have made about Maurier as philosopher earlier in this chapter, one can be tempted to classify him within the professional school, as Oruka has suggested. This tendency is not far-fetched as Bodunrin insists that a philosophical enterprise should exhibit these sets of characteristics as a discipline. Hence, Bodunrin insists that philosophy should be rigorous and systematic because this is quite essential. He identifies the "philosophic praxis with conceptual analysis" (Birt, 1991: 100). The only problem that arises with this claim is that philosophic praxis can only be viewed or realized through the practices of conceptual analysis and Bodunrin never provided reasons why this is this case. Birt, on this point, argues that presumably, Bodunrin might have thought that it might be "self-evident truth since everyone would agree. For him, philosophy either elaborates and works over concepts, or it is a rational critique of concepts" (Bodunrin, cited in Birt, 1991: 100). These criteria of philosophy raise some difficulties and they have always led most philosophy scholars to a problematic position of the enterprise.

Richard A. Wright is one of the Philosophy scholars who have contributed to the great debate. Wright was introduced to the idea of African philosophical thought on his reading of Horton's article entitled "traditional thought and the emerging African philosophy" published in the *Second Order* 1997 Vol 1. On this note, Wright (1984: 41) argued that he was "woken up from the dogmatic slumber" from reading the above-mentioned article in 1978. Wright examined Maurier's contribution to the great debate of African philosophy. Maurier entitled his contribution to the debate 'Do We have an African philosophy?' Then in light of this, Wright argues that Maurier had posed a similar question by asking 'Do we have a box of cornflakes?' This question can be answered by looking at the box. In a simple sense, the manner in which

Maurier has phrased the question seems like it only requires a piece of empirical evidence or it seems to be an empirical matter. By this, Wright seems to suggest that the question of the existence of African philosophy does not require empirical evidence. In the light of this line of thought, there is no object that is visible that accounts for African philosophy. But what is clear is that the question on hand, is what set of body of African thought can count as philosophy? This was the question central to the debate, as I have shown above. It is observable that Wright seems to be clear in his mind on what is the question that Philosophy scholars within this debate are attempting to answer. What is important is that addressing this question in this manner entails a number of other questions. It is arguable that attempting to answer the question of African philosophy can be deceptive if it is being answered simply by a 'yes' or a 'no' (Wright, 1984: 41). Wright argues that an "insightful response to the question of African philosophy requires answers to such questions as - What is the nature of philosophy? What constitutes acceptable materials for philosophical study? Is traditional African thought really of such a nature as to be of interest to philosophy or philosophers? The answers given to these questions will affect each thinker's response to the question 'Do we have an African philosophy?'" (*ibid*).

Wright observes that Jean-Paul Lebeuf claims that recent studies of African thought reveal "perfectly balanced metaphysical systems and ontologies which reveal a form of thinking that is as unimpeachable in its logic as Cartesianism" (cited in Wright, 1984: 43). On the other hand, Wright observed that, Maurier, who was a contemporary of Lebeuf, claims that there is no African philosophy. Now the question that arises is how these contemporary philosophers can take a contradictory position on the status of African thought or philosophy. It is from this observation that Wright began his criticism of Maurier's position on the debate. According to Maurier's central claim, there is no African philosophy until African philosophical thinkers' start to do conceptual analysis. Maurier's negative answer to the question of African philosophy is mostly informed by two claims. Firstly, the idea that doing philosophy is doing conceptual analysis. Secondly, the fact that there are no African thinkers doing conceptual analysis. According to Wright, both positions should be true if, Maurier's position is not to be destroyed.

If any African does conceptual analysis, or if philosophy is not solely conceptual analysis, then Maurier's position is confused. But how can one assume that in a continent with forty countries;

hundreds of languages; and hundreds of millions of people; no one does conceptual analysis? Maurier's more important claim that philosophy is conceptual analysis is even more debatable. Answers to the question "What is Philosophy?" are very controversial and "fundamental" because of the widespread disagreement among philosophers (Birt, 1991: 101).

It is clear that Maurier laboured under the assumption that "almost every philosopher has a view as to what constitutes philosophy" (Maurier, 1984: 26). Wright observed that this assumption is "...decisive in the determination of whether African philosophy exists" (Wright, 1984: 44). However, Birt argues that "Maurier does not even seek to justify his conception of philosophy before offering it as the standard" (1991: 101). The most absurd issue that Wright seemed to have raised is that there have been debates around the nature of philosophy, even Western philosophy, hence it appears presumptuous to dismiss African philosophy for failing to be identical to conceptual analysis (Wright, 1984: 44). Wright appears sympathetic to the idea of African philosophy.

One of the issues that have propounded the skepticism on the debate, according to Wright (1984: 50), is the absence of the literature. This then led to a number of Philosophy scholars becoming skeptics on the question of whether an African philosophy actually exists. In Wright's response to the question of literacy and philosophy, he acknowledges that "thought, which is the essence of philosophy, must have an expression to be considered and analyzed, and that this expression must be transmitted if the analysis is to be other than solipsistic" (Wright, 1984: 50). But Wright is also doubtful of the idea that literarily expression is the only mode of philosophizing alone. If written literature is the only way of philosophizing, then Socrates' thought must be dismissed as a category of philosophy also. Wright is of the view that "it is appropriate to rely on stories, oral traditions, and folklore in the study of African thought. These, he thinks, should be on a par with literature as traditionally considered for purposes of philosophical inquiry" (1984: 50). But can these set of materials be taken as philosophy? Presumably, these materials can be objects of philosophical reflections. Wright's position here, seems to be a bit controversial as an attempt to the question that is being answered. This might seem controversial but may be essential to those Philosophy scholars who wish to answer the question in the affirmative. The task that they will have to achieve is to actually articulate the criteria of what can count as African philosophy.

Regarding the question of the existence of African philosophy, Henry Odera Oruka answers Yes. Oruka does not only approach the question by offering the definition of philosophy per se. He strives to go an extra mile to "...help substantiate or invalidate the claim that traditional African people were innocent of logical and critical thinking" (Oruka, 1984: 51). This was in response to the issue of reducing African or not even affording them a "...room or mind to think independently and at times, even critical of the communal consensus" (*ibid*). Oruka does not dismiss the possibility of such thinkers on account of the illiteracy of traditional African culture. In fact, he says that "literacy is not a necessary condition for logical and philosophical thought" (Oruka, 1984: 52). Oruka's entry of (1975) "The Fundamental Principles in the Question of African Philosophy" captures the idea of what constitutes African philosophy. Oruka (1975) starts his article by distinguishing two senses of philosophy as a universal discipline. He, firstly, refers to the issues discussed by philosophers regardless of their background or location, while "...the other refers to the body of knowledge whose truth can be proved by methods which are independent of any personal, national or racial values and feelings" (Oruka, 1975: 45). Secondly, Oruka argues that "philosophy must be a discipline which employs principles that are objectively granted, or else that are rationally (logically) warrantable. And these principles, he maintains, if true, are true regardless of the person or place from which they originate" (1975: 46). It is important to note that the two senses of what constitutes the criteria for African philosophy, Oruka captures very well. This is because, traditionally, philosophy qua philosophy possesses some characteristics of universality. According to Oruka, in a simple sense, universality is the authentic criterion of authentic African philosophy. He says:

Now, it seems possible and necessary that the concern for African philosophy is a demand for African philosophy not in the unique sense, but only in the simple sense. Here, a piece of African philosophy would deserve to be described as 'African philosophy' simply in the sense that either (i), it is a work of an African thinker or philosopher (regardless of its subject-matter); or (ii), that it is a work dealing with a specific African issue, formulated by an indigenous African thinker, or by a thinker versed in African cultural and intellectual life (Oruka, 1975: 50).

It is the thinking of this researcher that a close reading of Oruka's passage of the criteria of philosophy is such that one can say that it is 'the many-option criteria'. Thus, unlike other Universalist proponents, Oruka does not advocate a philosophy that is monolithic. Oruka's conception of the criteria of what philosophy is or the nature of what African philosophy has

to be, as seen in the above quotation, has more options. Jonathan O. Chimakonam's reading of Oruka's criteria of philosophy is such that, it is disjunctive in nature (Chimakonam, 2015: 36). According to Chimakonam (*ibid*), "... Oruka married them with a conjunction, it would have made his postulation a lot stronger than that of Hountondji, rather he carefully chose a disjunction probably not to discredit a fellow universalist". This is visible in the definition provided by Oruka, as cited by Chimakonam, where he argues that:

...the truth of philosophy can be proved by methods which are independent of any personal, national or racial values and feelings that philosophy is a discipline which employs principles that are objectively granted or else that is rationally (logically) warrantable (Chimakonam, 2015: 36).

Oruka's definition of philosophy has more than one sense of how philosophy is universal in nature. Firstly, Oruka argues that "the truth of philosophy can be proved by methods which are independent of any personal, national or racial values and feelings" (*ibid*). Secondly, Oruka argues that "...philosophy is a discipline which employs principles that are objectively granted or that are rationally (logically) warrantable" (Oruka, 1975: 46). Oruka, further argues that:

... philosophy is universal does not mean that all the philosophers must have similar interests and employ similar *methods* in philosophy. Neither does it mean that all the rationally warrantable or objectively granted principles or methods must be identical or that they must establish similar truth (1984: 46).

Here, Oruka seems to concern himself with the claim associated with Hountondji, which is that "philosophy is universal and has a single method of inquiry" (Hountondji, 1983: 56). This claim is quite interesting as it starts to depict some of the philosophical differences that exist amongst the proponents of universalism in African philosophy. Although some of the philosophers can be categorized in the same philosophical camp, they have some finely detailed differences amongst them. According to Oruka's understanding of the condition of universality of philosophy, philosophy *qua* universal it has to have similar methods from culture to culture.

Kwasi Wiredu's answer to the question of the existence of African philosophy is yes, African philosophy does exist. But, in his own submission, Wiredu argues that:

In my opinion, the agenda for contemporary African philosophy must include the critical and reconstructive treatment of the oral tradition and the exploitation of the literary and scientific resources of the modern world in pursuit of a synthesis...If in this process of synthesis, contemporary African philosophers take critical cognizance of all these strands of the African experience, the resulting tradition of modern African Philosophy should be rich in its variety and vital in its relevance to contemporary existences (1992: 35).

Wiredu makes a distinction between “African philosophy as folk thought preserved in oral traditions, and African philosophy as critical, individual reflection, using modern logical and conceptual techniques” (1992: 35). Wiredu is of view that African philosophy should not be equated with traditional African thought as this might delay the growth of contemporary African philosophy. Viewed critically, his persuasive submission as a reason for this claim could be that African philosophy will be taken as narratives of ideas of the forefathers (Wiredu 1980). He further argues that:

In most parts of Africa, we would have, in that case, to abstain from such disciplines as symbolic logic and its philosophical interpretation, the Philosophy of Mathematics and of the Natural and Social sciences, the theory of knowledge associated with the foregoing disciplines and the moral, political and social philosophy which has arisen as a response to the needs of modern times. We would have to regard all such disciplines as ‘unAfrican’ and content ourselves with repeating the proverbs and folk conceptions of our forefathers, or should we be moved by some quirk of the spirit to dabble in those modern disciplines we would have to represent ourselves as venturing into a unAfrican domain (Wiredu, 1980: X-XI).

In his attempt to make the distinction between traditional African thought and Western thought, Wiredu came to the conclusion that African traditional philosophies, at best, are only folk-philosophy. As a result, Wiredu argues that “...philosophy in the narrower sense, must contain not just theses. Without argument and clarification, there is, strictly, no philosophy” (1980: 47). In his, *On Defining African philosophy*, Wiredu’s essay that concerned itself with understanding the nature of African philosophy, Wiredu suggests that the key criteria for what counts as African philosophy needs to be sensitive to the weakness and the analysis raised by Hountondji. Wiredu further argues, that the proper definition of African philosophy has to take into consideration the process and issues such as "universal philosophical tools. This is because, according to him, (a), those are what make a discourse philosophy (b). African cultures and languages, because philosophy is culture relative (c) and exchanges among individual African philosophers, because those are the proper modes of philosophical

engagement" (Wiredu, 1992: 105). Wiredu advised that:

Any attempt on the part of a contemporary African philosopher to define African philosophy that does not take account of this process is out of touch with reality. But for him to take account of it is not just to take notice of it; it is for him to take a position with respect to it. For in this matter, he would not be merely trying to describe a phenomenon existing entirely independently of himself, but, rather, seeking to define the principles of his own practice (1991: 105).

It is clear from the quotes above that one of the criteria, like individual discourse and their universal orientation, have been emphasized as the genuine characteristics that African philosophy should denote. On this note, Wiredu suggests three criteria as adequate for the discourse as to what counts as African philosophy. The criteria as he calls them, involve "...collecting, interpreting, and retelling those of our traditional proverbs, maxims, conceptions, folktales, etc., that bear on the fundamental issues of human existence" (Wiredu, 1991: 106). The second criteria is to "...learn and disseminate, and, even, possibly make original contributions to those philosophies of our erstwhile colonizers and their ilk" (*ibid*). Wiredu further argues that African should not ignore their own cultures. As ignoring them, "this... [Would] be...a very unintelligent option" (1980: 106). The third criteria, that he favors is captured as follows:

For a body of thought to be legitimately associated with a given race, people, region or nation, it is sufficient that it should be, or should become, a living tradition therein. It is indifferent whether it is home brewed or borrowed wholly or partially from other peoples. Since we are, as has been repeatedly pointed out, still trying to develop a tradition of modern philosophy, our most important task is not to describe, but to construct and reconstruct. And the real issue regarding African philosophy is how best this may be done (Wiredu, 1991: 106-107).

Wiredu, like Bodunrin and Hountondji, argue that African philosophy is still in the making. Even though, the Philosophy scholars have answered the question of whether there is African philosophy in the Affirmative, they did not entirely accept African philosophy as presented in a form of works such as Tempels "Bantu philosophy" and Mbiti's "African Religion and Philosophy". A number of African philosophers that I have presented above, conceived philosophy as a discipline with distinct problems and methodology such as Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Biology. However, there are other African Philosophy scholars who reject the idea that philosophy can be defined strictly in academic terms. These scholars argue that

beside philosophy being a discipline that is reflective, and an organized body of knowledge that is a product of human reflection, it is an integral part of what constitutes philosophy. They argue that if 'reflective activity' can be part of traditional African world-views, it then entails that it is philosophy. And it should be amongst one of the constitutive criteria of what counts as African philosophy. This implies "...philosophy of a people that have little or nothing to do with the academic exponents of that philosophy. Philosophy is a universal experience. Every culture has its own world-view" (Onyewuenyi, 1991: 37). In what follows, this study will present some of the contributors to the great debate on the question of whether African philosophy actually exists.

2.1.1.2. The particularists¹² approach to African philosophy

Innocent C. Onyewuenyi answered the question of African philosophy in the affirmative. But his answer to the question of what can count as African philosophy is quite interesting. It is interesting because it takes a different approach to African philosophy than the philosophers presented above. Onyewuenyi, as a point of entry to his essay, makes an interesting observation of Bantu Philosophy on Placide Tempels stance concerning the ethnographers, asserting that "...Ethnographers have denied all abstract thought to tribal peoples. The civilized Christian was exalted, the savage and pagan man was denigrated. Out of this concept, a theory of colonization was born which now threatens to fail" (Tempels, 1959: 14). Onyewuenyi, in view of this, posed a question of whether "ethnographers were correct by denying abstract thought to tribal peoples" (1991: 29). Onyewuenyi believes that there is a model of thought that is common amongst all Africans south of the Sahara. This model of thought is highly criticized and lambasted by Hountondji as a consensus of "the myth of unanimity" (1983: 60-61). The myth that runs in ethnophilosophical reports of the African people is that there is some sense of unanimity that exists in their mode of thought. Perhaps this is just one aspect about the issue of ethnophilosophy.

Notwithstanding the harsh criticisms, most members of this school remain unrepentant about

¹² The particularists, in other instances in the literature in African philosophy, they are called the nationalist approach to African philosophy. See Wiredu (1980).

their position on what constitutes African philosophy. The school upholds the idea that there is community ontology that informs them in some African thought. In a simple sense, for them, community ontology signifies African thought. African philosophy is different from Western philosophy that rides on the crest of individualistic ontology. Onyewuenyi further argues that:

The discovery of African philosophy has influenced African scholars in writing about African personality or what the French-speaking Africans call Negritude. Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor, Aime Cesaire, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Chinua Achebe have written prose and verse to celebrate this philosophy—a philosophy of unity and complete encounter of all things and beings, which by reason of the dynamic character of African ontology, has surfaced on the communal structure of our society based on the division of labour and rights; in which man attains growth and recognition by how well he fulfills a function for the overall well-being of the community (1991: 44-45).

Thus, in view of the above quotation, Onyewuenyi emphasizes the idea that African philosophy can be a philosophy that is distinct from Western philosophy, if and only if, it has been modeled over the communitarian model of thought. Wiredu has a problem with this model of thought. For Wiredu, this model would provide an “impression that African philosophy is a monolithic body of argumentative communal beliefs, and nothing else” (1991: 95). He goes on to suggest that it is a “descriptive, theoretically unreconstructed model” (Wiredu, 1991: 103).

Chukwulozie K. Anyanwu writes:

I am saying that...African philosophy is a particular instance of philosophy as a cultural product. It is definitely unphilosophical to subordinate the different visions of all cultures to the European world-vision alone, and this is what the ‘perennial’ and the ‘universalist’ philosophers are trying to do...I argue that every philosophy is relative to its basic assumptions about the nature of experienced reality as well as its epistemological attitude or method ...And furthermore, different assumptions and models of experienced reality lead to different philosophical doctrines (1987: 237).

He, further, argues that:

I admit that all men, in spite of cultural differences, may have the same primordial tendencies; but there are still differences in the interpretations and meaning of such tendencies. Whereas a philosophical synthesis of experience is desirable and urgent in the twentieth century, I doubt that the plurality of world visions can be sacrificed in favour of one cultural philosophy alone (Anyanwu, 1987: 237).

This position was emphasized later by Godfrey Ozumba when he argued that,

The gift of nature varies from person to person, from locality to locality, from continent to continent. This being so, people can only use their naturally endowed gifts to meet their needs. To the extent that these gifts differ, the approach to the provision of solutions to these problems or needs will differ as well. In essence, the argument is that our thoughts are fashioned along certain lines depending not only on our needs but on our abilities. And as time goes on, depending on the path we have charted and followed, the divergence in terms of approach to meeting our needs will continue to widen...we must not lose sight of the fact that a lot has happened in the world. Ranging from cross-cultural borrowing, wars, slavery, colonialism...All these are very important in knowing why all areas in practice cannot do things alike (1995: 18).

In the light of the foregoing, it is clear that Ozumba is of a view that the existence of different cultures amongst human beings entails that there is a possibility of different methodological approaches. Thus, to deny methodological difference is to deny that there are differences in cultures. This view, I suspect, stemmed from the idea that different cultures have different worldviews and differences in ways of conceiving and interpreting the world. This line of thought is not only perpetuated by Ozumba alone in African philosophy, for there are other philosophers who endorse the same position. Hence, Kwame Gyekye's argument that "...philosophy is essentially a cultural phenomenon..." (Gyekye, 1987: ix). He later emphasizes this point in his *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. Here, Gyekye writes:

...whether from the same culture or from different cultures, are not in complete agreement on the definition and methods of their discipline, a close examination of the nature and purpose of the intellectual activities of thinkers from various cultures and societies of the world reveals nevertheless that philosophy is essentially a critical and systematic inquiry into the fundamental ideas or principles underlying human thought... (1997: 5).

Another advocate of the ethnophilosophical approach to Africa philosophy is Fainos Mangena in his work *Ethnocentric Bias in African Philosophy Vis-à-vis Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda Ontology and Ethno-philosophy*, seeks to object to the idea that there is a universal philosophy. As for Mangena, the criticism of Hountondji and Appiah on ethnophilosophy is not convincing, and this is "...because of their glide into Western philosophical forms of thought" (Mangena, 2014: 24). He further wrote: "...ethnophilosophy is just like Western philosophy, as it is based on a recognized form of reasoning, namely inductive reasoning, which is packaged in proverbs, riddles, and other cultural resources" (*ibid*). This justification that is provided by Mangena and to some extent other advocates of the particularist thesis, is not convincing. I concur with

Appiah and Hountondji, at this point, when they argued that “ethnophilosophy is predicated on ... [a] major assumption... “unanimism” ... [in contrast, it was argued that they are no] central body of ideas that are shared by black Africans quite generally...” (Appiah, 1992: 95). This is one issue that most philosophers who advocate for the particularists thesis are in danger of falling victim to.

2.2. Criticisms against the Universalists Thesis

Lancinay Keita’s critique of Hountondji regarding his criticism of ‘ethnophilosophy’, can be found in a chapter in Floistand’s volume titled “African philosophy in Context: A Replay to Hountondji”, where it takes on the general view of Hountondji’s position on philosophy. Keita rejects Hountondji’s reduction of African philosophy to what he calls ethnophilosophy. Keita is of a view that Hountondji has narrowed down the scope and conception of philosophical activity. He is of view that Hountondji’s conception of philosophy is narrowly determined by the specific path of the development of philosophy in Europe. He also notes Hountondji’s additional definition of philosophy as “a theory of scientific practice, the development of which depends on the real development of scientific knowledge” (Hountondji, 1983: 81). Keita further argues that, Hountondji’s conception of philosophy insists that genuine African philosophy has to accept the European (actually analytic¹³) model of philosophy. Keita thinks:

... model contemporary African philosophy on the trends and schools of thought now in vogue in Europe would be a serious error, since at this historical juncture ... both contemporary European and African societies are radically different. This does not mean that African thinkers should obsessively cling to old traditions and beliefs, which Keita admits are outmoded. But, if nothing else, African philosophy should be a criticism of the unthinking acceptance of the transfer of pedagogical and research models from the European metropolis (1987: 90).

It is clear that Keita is of view that there is a problem it conceives philosophy with Western lenses as this move will render the nature of African philosophy to be a serious error. Afterall, philosophy should be conceived as a philosophy that is sensitive to the African traditional cultures as ‘European and African [cultures] are radical different’ and these differences are important epistemologically. Hence, there is no need for one pedagogy to be given priority

¹³ See the debate between Emmanuel Chikwudi Eze (2001), Ward Jones (2001) and Bernard Matolino (2015).

over the others.

Similarly, K. C. Anyanwu also criticizes Hountondji and Bodunrin for their prescribing of European models of philosophy for an African context. In his article, “The Idea of Art in African Thought”, Anyanwu criticizes the Universalist philosophers who think that philosophy is merely an academic issue. Bodunrin suggests that for African philosophy to be regarded as a philosophy, it has to exhibit characteristics such as analytic thought, since, as it stands, it is meaningless and in essence, philosophy should share the same meaning in all cultures. Anyanwu is of view that the acceptance of Bodunrin’s analytic model entails an acceptance of its assumption “that the problems of philosophy are not those of reality and experience but of language and logic” (Anyanwu, 1987: 239). In his criticism of ‘ethnophilosophy’, Hountondji argues that there is a unique method of doing philosophy that is shared amongst those involved in the philosophical activity. As for Anyanwu, the concept and activity of philosophy is a product of reflection on experience, a guide to life. And the experience out of which philosophy emerges “is determined by what people have lived and historical situations” (Anyanwu, 1987: 236).

In his “African Philosophy, Culture and Traditional Medicine”, M. Akin Makinde was still bound by the vexatious question of African philosophy. In this anthology, more than half of the book was dedicated to the question of African philosophy. Makinde answers in the affirmative regarding the question of African philosophy. Birt argued that it is obvious that Makinde’s answer to the question of African philosophy is affirmative, because he describes “philosophy in a non-technical sense” and he is of the view that philosophy had “existed in African thought systems even before its discovery by colonial scholars” (1988: 35). He further argues that a definition of philosophy “is still being awaited,” and in the meantime, we can accept a description of philosophy “as an attempt to arrive [at] reasoned answers to important questions” (Makinde, 1988: 23). In fact, for Makinde, the idea of Philosophy scholars preoccupied with the question of African philosophy as a non-philosophical activity was concerning because it hinders and obstructs the philosophical activities that need to be done. He further suggests that African philosophers should be careful not to be consumed by this question to a point of obsession because it can lead them to fail to make a contribution to the development of the enterprise. Makinde is of the view that the question of African philosophy

can be settled by a proper comparison between African thinking and Western philosophy, hence, he suggests that this can be done “by means of some African traditional thinking which addresses itself to much of the same philosophical issues as Western philosophy” (1988: 44). He thinks that the idea that African thinking is ‘rigorous’ enough is a non-starter, because it will perpetuate the mythology of a single philosophical method. Birt argues that “traditional thought can be properly called philosophy, even in the modern sense if we do not identify philosophy with empirical science or analytic philosophy. Historically, philosophy reveals no facile adherence to models of rigor or exactness; nor is it always ‘critical’ or identified with linguistic or conceptual analysis” (1991: 107).

Kwame Gyekye defines philosophy as “...a rational, critical and systematic inquiry into the fundamental ideas underlying human thought, experience, and conduct” (1987: 4). Gyekye’s conception of Philosophy is in contrast to Robin Horton’s. For his part, Robin Horton argues that African traditional thought is non-philosophical because of its failure to develop logic and epistemology. Gyekye's important point is that the idea of denying African peoples a philosophical thought is to say that they are unable to engage in reflections and conceptualizing their experiences. Gyekye has problems with philosophers like Bodunrin, Wiredu, and Hountondji, who claim that an African philosophical tradition is only now being formed. “Philosophy of some kind is involved in the thought and action of every people” (1987: 4). According to Gyekye, “philosophical activity is universal” (*ibid*). In contrast, this philosophical position is not similar to how Bodunrin imagined philosophy. This researcher suspects that Gyekye’s conception of the universality of the philosophical activity is based on the idea that rationality and reflection are not limited to a certain individual of a particular racial outlook. Outlaw questions the very assumption of rejecting African philosophy, but questions “must we not have a philosophy like theirs? Are we not also men like them?” (1987: 14). “Does it really involve a radicalization of philosophical activity and prevailing conceptions of the person? Or is it a tormented reaction to the wound of colonialism, a shield against European contempt? The uncritical adherence of many Africans to the narrowest of European academic models makes one wonder whether it is Outlaw’s deconstructive project of radicalizing human self-understanding and philosophic praxis that is being realized, or instead a covert effort to demonstrate African humanity by archaic Western standards. Yet,

there may be an escape from this impasse. Perhaps, the present stage is merely transitional. The future development of African thought may prove the prophetic astuteness of Outlaw's attributing of a radical, innovative mission to African philosophy. If so, this could mean the dawn of new enlightenment. One can only wonder and hope" (Birt, 1991: 109).

2.3. Conclusion

As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, the main focus of the chapter was to explain the basis of the debate that serves as a forerunner to the evolution of African philosophy. This was achieved by looking at the contributions of Philosophy scholars to the great debate in African philosophy. This chapter firstly provided an overview of the great debate about the nature of African philosophy. The chapter argued that on the question of whether African philosophy exists or not, there is more than one response. The first category of Philosophy scholars argue that African philosophy does not exist. On this point, this researcher suggests Hart as an example of those philosophers who have argued for that position. This chapter has argued that this position was misguided because of the misapprehension of the question at hand. This chapter also argued that Philosophy scholars who insist that African philosophy does not exist, consists mostly of those whose claims were based on a misconception of the question. This chapter has argued that there are philosophy scholars who are of the view that African philosophy actually exists. Based on this position, this chapter has demonstrated that there are different distinct positions amongst Philosophy scholars who argue that African philosophy exists. These differences are also visible within the same camp. This chapter contends that this position seeks to combat the dogmatic approaches of doing African philosophy in our context that went unchallenged for some time. In a simple sense, this researcher argued that, the approaches that are at the center of criticism are ethnophilosophy. On the other hand, the second position of Philosophy scholars who affirm that African philosophy exists are the nationalists. The nationalists seem to argue that there is a model of thought that is common amongst all Africans south of the Sahara. In view of this, there is an idea that there is community ontology that informs some sense of African thought. This implies that, if African people are denied thinking like the ethnographers, then we will be denying them a philosophy.

Chapter Three

The Contemporary Debate on the Problem of Universals in African Philosophy: A Rejoinder

3. Introduction

In the previous two chapters (1 & 2), the study traced the problem of the relationship between the universal and particular regarding the concrete objects of the origin of philosophy, i.e the debate between Plato and Aristotle. Thus, the debate between Plato and Aristotle over the nature of the relationship between the universal and particular to concrete objects and concepts was concerned with the question of whether universals actually exist. In this debate, Aristotle actually argued that universals do not exist. The development of the problem of the relation between the universal and particular was evaluated from Western philosophical literature and later (in the second chapter particularly), the problem was demonstrated using African philosophical literature. In African philosophical literature the debate of the relation between the universal and the particular of the concrete objects came to be known as the debate between the Universalists and Particularists. At the center of this debate is the concept of 'philosophy' and whether it should be conceived as universal or particular. Then philosophical scholars, on this account, have been concerned with the question of what sets of characteristics 'philosophy' should denote for it to attain universal status. But is philosophy only universal in its character? This is one of the key questions that have informed the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists in African philosophy.

At the end of the nineteenth century, and concerning the debate between the Universalists and Particularists, two entries were made of Polycarp Ikuenobe and Jay M. Hook which served as the criticism of the Universalists' thesis. These, in literature installments in African philosophy, serve as an interesting position regarding our understanding of the Universalists' thesis. Understanding the Universalists' thesis is important as we would be able to see if the dichotomy actually exists. But the rejoinder of the problem of the relationship between the universal and particular in concrete objects, in terms of the concept of philosophy in African philosophical, is credited to Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, as has been espoused in his *African*

Philosophy and the Analytic Tradition. Eze offers arguments to see the feasibility of the relation between African philosophy and analytical philosophy. Contrary to those who are of view that the debate between the universalists and particularists is merely about the methodological problem of doing African philosophy, I argue that they have watered down the debate as this debate is about the relation between the universals and particulars regarding the concrete objects and concepts. But in the context of African philosophy, the debate is about the concept of 'philosophy' and whether we can talk about it in terms of universal or particular characters. So, I am of view that the debate is more sophisticated than what a number of scholars actually tend to propose.

The aim of the current chapter is to narrate the contemporary rejoinders to the debate between the universalists and the particularists. In the first section, this chapter will attempt to ask the question whether the debate between the Universalists and Particularists is motivated by their drive and the methodological question only. The reason for investigating this is because a number of philosophy scholars have argued as if this debate is about the question of method. In the second section, the chapter will concern itself with the rejoinder to the debate of universals by Eze in his attempt to understand the benefits of the relationship between analytical and African philosophy. In this rejoinder, the response that is offered by Jones (2001) in his defense of the combination of the 'ultra-faithful and anti-import' stirred a controversy in the 20th century over the backward mentality, to put it bluntly. Philosophy scholars like Matolino (2015), have induced some degree of criticism to Jones' universalism in the attempt to show some fundamental weakness in his universalism. This can be considered to be the pinnacle of the 20th century debate on African philosophy in terms of the idea of universals. I then argue that there is a need for philosophy to see past philosophical universalism. In the third and final section, this study intends to offer a cursory alternative to philosophical universalism in alignment with the views offered by Janz (2009) and Chimakonam (2015). My introduction of the alternative route that African philosophy can take as a philosophical tradition, is not to offer a solution to the problem that I have set up so far, but rather a way of demonstrating that there are other conversations that are happening regarding other questions that are similar in nature to that which is concerned about the nature of African philosophy.

3.1. Is the Debate between the Universalists and Particularists about Methodology?

This study had earlier hinted, specifically in chapter two, the idea that there is a simplistic interpretation of the debate of the Universalists and Particularists in African philosophical literature. The debate between the Universalists and Particularists has been construed as the debate about the methodology of doing African philosophy. Inusah Hesein (2010: 15) reiterates argued that “for the past thirty years, a number of African philosophers have made several attempts at searching for an authentic methodology for doing African philosophy”. Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu (2013) and Mangena (2014), similarly believe that the debate between the Universalists and Particularists is about the methodology of doing African philosophy. Hesein argued that “[The]...search for this genuine methodology stems from the quest to give African philosophy a universal recognition and to make it, where possible, a global discipline” He further argues that “[there are] ...scholars who hold the view that Africans had no authentic and genuine philosophy, but believed that the only genuine culture or philosophy is Western philosophy” (Hesein, 2010: 19). Hesein, on this account, accused the Universalists of contending that “...the methodology employed by scholars of African philosophy was inferior since it falls below the so-called standard tradition of analytic philosophy of the West” (*ibid*). The reasons according to Hesein, as he mentioned earlier, are seen as having a purpose of “denigrating” African thought. In the words of Hesein (2010: 15):

The late 19th...century saw a host of European anthropologists whose works in the areas of African philosophy and religion were directed towards denigrating Africa. Western anthropologists, ethnocentrists, sociologists and missionaries of [this]...period were rather motivated more by the desire to justify existing racist’s structures than by the true spirit of enquiry. Their position was motivated by their inability to discover the profound meaning which lay beneath, and this was an additional factor which prevented the European racists from interpreting the African cultural symbols in an objective style.

Hesein, here, seems to suggest that European scholars have failed to interpret African traditional thought in a manner that would be objective and would fit in the global philosophical space. Hence, Hesein (2010: 15) suggests that they were just blunt racists. Thus, as argued in the second chapter, Hart seems to be the example that comes to mind although there are a number of philosophers that are accused of this. But criticisms similar in

character have been launched towards some of the African philosophical scholars who have argued that for a philosophy to be what it is, it has to be universal in character and in methodology. These scholars who are called the Universalists, have been accused of advancing the philosophical thesis that marginalizes other philosophical thoughts and celebrates a Western imperialism project epistemologically also. Thus, this will evoke a wrong assumption that Africans do not possess any philosophy, as all their ideas are just borrowed from European cultures (Oraegbunam, 2006).

Hesein (2010: 20), on this account, substantially argues that “[the]...Universalists argument rests on a mistake and that their argument is motivated by cultural imperialism”. Hesein conceived the sole aim of the arguments of the Universalists as an attempt to bring about a philosophy that is transcultural. And regarding this transcultural philosophy, Hesein is of the view that the quest is a “goose chase” (2010: 20). In his view, it is necessary to differentiate between transcultural and intercultural philosophy. The prefix ‘trans’ means beyond or across. Transcultural philosophy thus means a philosophy that goes beyond cultures. The prefix ‘inter’ on the other hand means between. So, we define inter-cultural philosophy as a philosophy done between people from different cultural orientations. The former constitutes the object of search of the Universalist, and the latter constitutes the object of search of the Particularist. It will be recalled that the contention of the Universalist is that there is nothing like philosophy that is essentially African (Hesein, 2010: 20).

Viewed critically, this study acknowledges some reservations about the narratives of the status core by Hesein, in relation to the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists. One of the concerns, in more specific terms, has to do with the arguments that are offered by the Universalists to substantiate their claim that philosophy is universal in character. This researcher observes that there is a strawman in Hesein’s presentation of the Universalists arguments which claim that philosophy is universal in character. I am of view that there is no African philosophical group that is categorized as Universalist that had in fact, argued that “...there is nothing like philosophy that is essentially African” (ibid). But the Universalists key claim was that African philosophy at that time was not fully meeting the standards of being philosophical that it was just returning to non-epistemic status. In reading Hountondji (1983), Wiredu (1980) and Gyekye (1995; 1997),

one can see that none of these philosophers is making the claim that there is nothing like philosophy that is essentially African, but, they are mostly worried about how critical the philosophy that is forward by those associated with the ethnophilosophical approach to philosophy is. But the question still stands is whether the debate between the Universalists vis-a-vis the Particularists is about the methodology of doing African philosophy only.

A sophisticated and thorough analysis of the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists will arrive at the fact that there seems to be more than just a mere methodological problem in the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists. There are two reasons that can be offered for this claim. Firstly, the origin of the problem is not seen as the problem of methodology, but of the relation between the universal and the particular of the concrete objects and concepts. In view of this, one can denote that “philosophers celebrate the perennial problems” (Afolayan, 2009: 363), and that if this problem is persistent it should not take a radical form at its origin. Secondly, the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists seems to be mostly about the very nature of philosophy or the concept of philosophy itself. Thirdly, scholars are mostly worried about the question of whether philosophy can best be construed as a universal or particular phenomenon. In doing so, they seem to be focusing on particular characteristics for that particular philosophy to attain a philosophical status.

One can suggest, in view of the foregoing, that the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists is such that a sophisticated interpretation will be arrived at that goes beyond the mere methodological squabbles. Perhaps it is arguable that this methodological conflict is just a fibre of the actual problems that the debate of the Universalists and Particularists seems to be worried about. A minimal interpretation of the literature will most likely result in the idea that the debate is about the methodology of doing African philosophy. But Appiah believes that a minimal interpretation will not amount to anything but a series of philosophical arguments that can be viewed as the debate that he formulated as “us, insiders, and them outsiders” (1992: 56). Philosophy, like any other discipline of inquiry, enjoys the privilege of having multiple methodologies of inquiry. Hence, there will be no need for prioritization of one philosophical method over others. Presumably, these were the sentiments that Hesein had opted to unpack in his defense of the particularist perspective as the “...best method for

doing African philosophy” (Hesein, 2010: 15). It will be worthwhile to restate that the debate between Universalists and Particularists is solely about the relation between the universal and particular. How the concept that philosophy can be seen in terms of the relation between the universal and particular as we are human beings who are vastly befogged by a number of particulars remains a matter of concern. It is also true that philosophy cannot be talked about without its practitioners. In the light of this thought therefore, human beings who are the sole practitioners of 'philosophy' are bound by a number of particulars. Then the question that arises is should this philosophy that is constructed from this specific phenomena and experiences get to be construed solely as particular in nature?

Some of the solutions to the problems raised above cannot yet be offered, and in other instances, they might even go beyond the scope of the current study. But they were worth mentioning so as to demonstrate the delicateness of the problem of the category of universal in African philosophy.

In summary, this section was concerned with the problem of whether the debate between the universal is solely about the methodological issues of doing African philosophy or otherwise. On this note, the section arrived at a conclusion that the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists is more than just mere methodological problems of doing African philosophy. With this in mind, the next section seeks to move on to a discussion on the rejoinder to the debate of the Universalists and Particularists in African philosophy in the 20th century.

3.2. The Contemporary debate on the Universal and Particular of Philosophy

A question might have arisen at the dawn of the 20th century why was there a debate on the nature of African philosophy? As Andrew Uduigwomen (1995: 32) had argued, “the debate or controversy on whether or not there is an African philosophy is dead and buried”, it is vital to mention, as argued above, that the debate on African philosophy was about the question of whether there is a body of knowledge that

qualifies as African philosophy¹⁴. In his attempt to understand the relationship between the analytical and African philosophy, Eze actually re-opened the debate between the Universalists and Particularists in some sense. Against this premise, this section seeks to discuss some of the theoretical positions in the relationship between the analytical and African philosophy.

3.2.1. Emmanuel C. Eze on African and Analytical Philosophy

In his paper, “African philosophy and the Analytic Tradition”, Eze (2001) seeks to portray that there is a traceable antagonistic character between the analytic and African philosophy. According to him, the relationship between the analytical and African philosophy has been spelt out as “...tense and irreconcilable” (Matolino, 2015: 434). To begin with, Eze expresses his understanding of the relationship between the Analytical Tradition and African philosophy (Matolino, 2015: 433) by mentioning some of the key themes of the analytical philosophy, i.e ‘Modality’, ‘Quantification’, ‘Causality’, ‘Method of Analysis’, ‘Intentionality’, ‘Propositions’ and so forth (Eze, 2001: 205). The question which arises, in terms of the relationship between the analytic philosophy and African philosophy, is “in what ways does African philosophy fit into these categories and why...”? (*ibid*). This only occurs in situations where “...one even chooses to speak of African philosophy and the Analytical Tradition” (*ibid*).

The formulation implies, first of all, that not all of African philosophy belongs to the 'analytic tradition' and that perhaps, we ought to specify what the African traditions of philosophy have contributed to the analytic tradition, or how the analytic tradition has paid or not paid attention to African philosophy. The problem with this assumption, however, is that most analytic philosophers do not-and perhaps cannot-even speak about 'African philosophy', although some may be able to think or write about, say, philosophies of Africa; philosophy for Africans; philosophy in Africa, or even ‘philosophy and the study

¹⁴ More on this matter, check chapter 2, section one (the great debate), subsection one; in this section I discuss the misconception that Hart expresses in the debate of whether there is African philosophy.

of Africa' (Eze, 2001: 205-206).

The uneasiness of analytical philosophers, not to even talk about African philosophy, is solely based on the idea that philosophy is universal. Furthermore, the fact that philosophy is universal presupposes that "...it cannot be narrowed or contextualized by modifiers such as African, Indian, German and so on" (Eze, 2001: 206). He further argues that the geographic circumscription of philosophy is slightly different "...from the ethnic or nationalist qualifications that may be intended by the notion, for example, of a distinctively *Russian* philosophy, *Akan* philosophy" (*ibid*). However, "...philosophy itself cannot be reduced by ethnic or cultural limitations" (*ibid*). Eze (2001: 206) concludes by arguing that "...philosophizing may arise from particular countries and even from diverse cultural and social contexts within one country, philosophy itself transcends divisions of culture, nation, or country".

Eze's conception of philosophy is that it is capable of analyzing "...anything without itself becoming just one entity among ...the many things analyzed¹⁵ (*ibid*). But in cases where "...one nationalizes, ethicizes, culturalizes or racializes philosophy, philosophy cannot assume and enjoy the necessary and appropriate distance required for work of objective analysis" (*ibid*). Eze (2001) points out that those analytical philosophers who are reluctant to talk of African philosophy will argue that philosophy can analyze things, but it cannot be reduced to the same ontological level of the things that it seeks to analyze. Hence, Eze suggests that philosophy remains like:

...a chemical catalyst, unchanged by the very things whose analysis makes its own activity possible. Similarly, when philosophy takes an interest in the analysis of itself, this self-analysis must be characterized not according to national, ethnic, or cultural prefixes or qualifiers, but as the even more philosophically rarefied notion of metaphilosophy (2001: 206).

Eze calls the proponents who hold this view about African philosophy, the "Ultra-faithfuls" (2001: 207). This group speaks of "the history of philosophy as if, it is the history of analytical

¹⁵ In this statement Eze, seems to be quite careful in his construction of this sentence in light of the philosophical problems that Aristotle had been worried in the antiquity. Aristotle accused his teacher's theory of form as suffering with the problem of one thing to be over many. Hence, this formulation Eze is quite careful that 'philosophy' will not suffer the same fate of been an object that is seen in light of being one over many.

philosophy” (*ibid*). Eze suggests that there are at least four groups¹⁶ of analytical philosophers who are quite reluctant to talk about African philosophy. 1), Ultra-faithful; (2), The cautious namer; (3), The fearful; and (4) The true Universalists.

Firstly, the *ultra-faithful*, according to Eze, argue that “African philosophy is nonexistent because there is only one, universal, discipline of philosophy”. The only thing that one can talk about is “...philosophy of African cultures, but one cannot speak legitimately about the discipline of African philosophy ...” (2001: 207). The reason is that philosophy cannot be reduced to the modifiers like Africa and so on. Another reason that can be offered for this claim is that philosophy is a catalyst, and it cannot be reduced to the same ontological level as the thing that it seeks to analyze. The *cautious namer group*, secondly, holds that there is no need to describe or name the “work-in-progress” unless we are to “lose control of the work” (Eze, 2001: 208). The *fearful group*, thirdly, is of the standpoint that by its naming it we might fall in complacency and “assume that the thing already exists because there is a name for it, or that the unpredictable gods will punish us for assuming as certainty a project whose success, depends on divine inspiration, noting that the best course is one of reticence and demurral” (*ibid*). The *true Universalists*, which is the fourth group, hold that culture and theory should not necessary provoke conflict but needs to mutually influence each other. In Eze’s words “...cultures ...theories and disciplines, or competing traditions within a discipline, need not to be mutually incompatible or incommensurable” (2001: 209). Thus, “theories ...can apply cross-culturally or across traditions” (*ibid*). What the actual reality about the concept of ‘cross - culturality’ is that there is a need for dialogue, not a ‘one-way’ direction of knowledge from “Europe to Africa and India” (*ibid*). *Historical*, is the fifth and final group that holds that philosophy as we know it today, emerged from a specific context. In modern philosophy, for example, there was a “competition between

¹⁶ The five groups of those philosophers who are reluctant to of talk about African philosophy are clearly discussed in Matolino's (2015: 434) analysis of Eze's attempts of separating those philosophers who are reluctant to talk about African philosophy. I think Matolino might not have taken account that his characterization of Eze's positions regarding the nature of philosophy and the status of African thought as philosophy to be Five. I take cognizant of the fact that Matolino throughout his paper talks of Eze characterization as 'four' but when looking closely at his characterization there are more than four positions. I do not think there is a debate over these matters at all, as it can be seen that where Matolino has separated, in accord to my characterization, positions 2 and 3, Eze takes those characterization as one. Then it can be concluded that there are actually five positions that Eze seems to propose regarding the nature of philosophy and the status of African thought as philosophy. Jones (2015: 215) characterizes Eze's four positions as ultra-faithful, cautious namer, anti-import and historicists positions.

the rationalists and the empiricists” (Eze, 2001: 210). This debate originated from the context of being “European and for a long time, white and male thinkers” (*ibid*). Eze noted that analytical philosophy has been caught in some serious shackles of its ahistorical and apolitical position make it unflexible and irrelevant to the problems that Africans experience.

Eze states that;

[i]n principle, philosophy's relationship to the historical or the political would not diminish its intellectual seriousness or academic rigour; nor should philosophy's relationship-if philosophy chooses this relationship-to the histories of neglected or politically abused peoples of Africa diminish philosophy's claim to universality. African issues are, first and above all, *human* issues (2001: 213).

In Matolino’s analysis of Eze’s position on the relationship between analytical philosophies of the neglected peoples of Africa, Matolino (2015) states that it is important to offer an explanation, in view of the foregoing quotation, so as to prevent some of the occasional confusions that arise. He states that at face-value, “it appears as if Eze is giving unconditional support towards a universal philosophy” (Matolino, 2015: 425). According to Matolino, Eze might appear to be making a simplistic case in suggesting that “...universal philosopher must find an interest or fit in African affairs... that in their actuality, are human affairs” (*ibid*). He suggests that Eze seems to propose a “more profound theory than merely findings fit and interests” (*ibid*). He suggested that “Eze is only pointing out [the] importance of the effects of the history of subjugation suffered by African people” (*ibid*). Matolino is of the opinion that what analytical philosophy should do, is not a merely show interest in the issues of the subjugation of the people, but it should at least be associated with them (2015: 435).

To put it bluntly, the real question is what can universal philosophy say on behalf of these people, and in direct condemnation of the perpetrators of their oppression and exclusion? While it is good for universal philosophy to speak in universal categories that can be applicable to all, the challenge here is specifically to speak of this condition that has been imposed on one people by another (Matolino, 2015: 435). But the idea of associating with the conditions of these subjugated people, does not entail that philosophy will be robbed of its universal status. In this attempt, Eze is addressing the fears of the ‘ultra-faithful’ that philosophy is universal and it cannot be reduced to specific modifiers as these conditions, which according to Eze, will not

lose their *raison d'etre* [as argued in Matolino (2015) analysis]. The ultra-faithful in their attempts to speak of philosophy, are mostly worried about general categories, and therefore make assumptions that these categories actually apply to all human beings while not concerned with the great injustices suffered by specific people. The ultra-faithful, as Matolino (2015: 435) puts it, are heavily concerned with the “universals that may just as well apply to no-one’s specific conditions”.

On the question of whether there are some metaphysical implications of this association between the Analytical philosophy and African philosophy, Matolino (2015: 435) suggests that a genuine association between the analytical philosophy and African philosophy “...may come to know certain truths about each other as well as the people they claim to represent”. In a situation where both these traditions begin to have some conversation with an element of mutual respect, “it is not totally inconceivable that they will arrive at a new and enriched metaphysical schemes” (ibid). The most beneficial sort of association, as Matolino argues, would be that of political aspiration. Some of the unenlightened remarks of the ability of black people to philosophize, have come from Western tradition, to be specific the ultra-faithful.

According to Matolino:

At the same time the West has a history of oppressing black people. While there is near universal acceptance of the irrationality of racism in analytic philosophy, it would go a long way towards philosophical equality if analytic philosophy were to align itself with the political aspirations of African philosophy (2015: 435).

The political aspiration of the African philosophical tradition, as Matolino puts it, will be its fight for equality between the philosophical traditions and the need for them to be treated as equals. That is partially advocated by Eze. “Both traditions derive their equality from the fact that they are both engaged in the business of reflecting on the nature of humankind and its surrounding” (Matolino, 2015: 435).

This section has dwelt upon narrating the relationship between analytical philosophy and African philosophy. It is arguable that much of Eze’s formulation of the relationship between analytical philosophy and African philosophy is a question of whether there are any benefits for association. Matolino, like Eze, is of the view that there can be fruitful

outcomes of this association. But one that will not result in analytical philosophy being robbed of its universal status.

3.2.1. Ward Jones on Universalism

In his paper, *Belonging to the Ultra-faithful: A Response to Eze*, Jones (2001) offers a response to Eze's conception of philosophy, and simultaneously defends the 'ultra-faithful' hence, his sentiments for, and support of the ultra-faithful position. Jones (2001: 215) begins by acknowledging that "...philosophy exists as a community with various recognized traditions of practices, dialogues and continually expanding bodies of work". But Jones condescendingly states that "if Africans have yet to do what is properly considered philosophy, hopefully it is an endeavor in which they will fruitfully engage in in the near future" (Jones, 2001: 215). These sentiments preempt the idea that African philosophy had not yet lived up to the standards that Jones reflected upon. Jones (2001) further asked the question whether African thought, had actually become more or less a philosophical tradition alongside the extant traditions like analytical philosophy. Matolino (2015) finds the observations of African philosophy by Jones quite perplexing. Matolino is concerned with the casting of aspersions that Jones is engaging in. In Matolino's (2015: 436) words, "I do not know how he can quite claim that Eze, in particular, shares his lack of attempt at working out whether 'African thought' is a philosophical tradition with the same status, as those Jones claims to have a philosophical status". Specifically, Matolino does not believe that there are some shared sentiments over the idea that African philosophy has attained the status of 'philosophy'. Hence, Matolino further accused Jones of bluntly misreading Eze's submission in his attempt to show the feasibility of the relation between analytical philosophy and African philosophy. Nonetheless, Jones's association of Eze with such skepticism towards African philosophy should be taken as pure ignorance. As is visible in the fourth position, Eze notes that there is a true Universalism. Hence, Matolino (2015: 436) asks, what will the purpose of his (Eze's) fourth position be?

As things stand, Jones' charge is wrong as it seeks to find support for his view that African philosophy has not attained the status of philosophy *qua* philosophy than those traditions that he talked about. Matolino (2015), in his critical analysis of Jones' claims, argues that

it would be reasonable to even claim that the very paper that Jones is responding to, can be used as evidence that African philosophy exists and is testimony of an existing philosophical tradition. The fact remains that African philosophy exists and is a current and progressive philosophical tradition, such that Eze contends that it should counter the hegemonic hold of the analytical philosophy. Given this, “It follows therefore, that any entity cannot effectively counter that which is, has not the same status as. You can only effectively counter, at the very least, an equal” (Matolino, 2015: 436). Jones claims that African philosophy had not yet lived up to the standards so as to attain the status of philosophy, this claim seems to disregard a number of works, like “Eze’s edited books in the late 1990s, and his numerous essays in the same period. Eze’s magnum opus, which was completed in 2007 (the year Eze died, six years after the essay Jones is responding to), *On Reason* (2008), should be considered as evident to the status of (African) philosophy, and discredit Jones’ uncharitable suspicions of the status of African philosophy. Eze was a living testimony to the status of African philosophy within the continental tradition” (Matolino, 2015: 436).

Furthermore, Matolino asks:

...what does Jones make of the efforts of all African philosophers who had written and worked on African philosophical themes up to November 2001, when his response was published? What does he make of works of such luminaries as Pauline Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, P.O. Bodunrin, Henry Odera Oruka and William Abraham? (2015: 436).

In view of the foregoing, Matolino seems to be clearly and unequivocally concerned with the claims by Jones to the effect that African philosophy has not yet attained the status of philosophy. Eze, in his paper, is not concerned with the question of the status of African philosophy despite the possibility of it being rendered meaningless or less in value.

At the opening of this chapter, I alluded to the debate on whether the existence of African philosophy, that is also known as the debate of the status of African philosophy, is a dead one (Uduigwomen, 1995: 32). It is quite incongruous with our¹⁷ knowledge, that Jones

¹⁷ 'Our', in this context, stands for all those intellectuals who are involved in the debate that had hoped to address the question of the status of African philosophy as dead. And as Uduigwomen (1995: 32) avers it will be only

seeks to resuscitate the dead question to create a platform for a view that he seeks to defend. “If anything, Jones just needs reminding of the six schemata of African philosophy made by Oruka (1998) quite a while ago. In that scheme, Jones will find a comprehensive demonstration of not only differences in orientation in African philosophy but also, the re-affirmation of the standing of African philosophy as a philosophical tradition with all the hallmarks of a true philosophical tradition. Such hallmarks will include debate on the nature of philosophy, its purpose, as well as, the different arguments on a specific topic all marshalled through reason” (Matolino, 2015: 436).

At the center, a charitable interpretation of the Jones’ response is his attempt to understand the question, “what would African thought have to be like were it to be a philosophy” (Jones, 2001: 2015). This question forms part of the central issues that Jones had sought to address in his response to Eze’s attempt to show the benefits of the relation between analytical philosophy and African philosophy. Jones’ response, to the above question, is that for any thought to count as philosophy, it must “necessarily ... [Be] universal in scope” (Jones, 2001: 216). This entails that philosophy by its very nature is concerned with issues that pertain “to all human beings” (*ibid*). In the light of this line of thought, the intellectual activity that calls itself a philosophy should concern itself with questions and problems that pertain to “all human beings”, but if it does not live up to this condition, then it is not philosophical (Jones, 2001:216).

To amplify this point, Jones (*ibid*), in his response to the question, claims that in as far as the ultra-faithful are concerned with the characterization of African philosophy it has to be “...highly developed and [for it to be an] ...important tradition”. Hence, Jones further attempted to examine German philosophy that has endured the test of time and - in his remarks - is a remarkable tradition in philosophy (*ibid*). “But as a tradition in philosophy, in the opinion of the ultra-faithful, the concerns of the proponents of German philosophy are necessarily universal. If they did not concern themselves with all human beings, then they would not be doing philosophy” (*ibid*). Jones, in view of the above submissions, seems to be skeptical of the African philosophical status. We can therefore conclude that African

be of historical interests as “...there is now an established traditional...”

philosophy can only count as philosophy if it concerns itself with questions that are universal in scope. Hence, it will not be an exaggeration to note that the intellectual reflection or philosophizing should ultimately concern itself with questions that pertain to all human beings. This amongst many, is a key philosophical condition that an intellectual activity should meet to be called a philosophy *qua* philosophy.

Jones is cognizant of the fact that the context from which the philosophical questions emerge is culture specific and an intellectual activity, if it is to qualify as philosophy, and should necessarily and ultimately be concerned with all human beings and their conditions. The origin of the question that a number of Universalists are attempting to account for concerning the discipline and concept of philosophy, are the implications and applications of the intellectual activity that is called philosophy universal in scope. Jones seems to be aware of the danger that is inherent in the practitioners of philosophy that is embedded in particular cultures or subgroups. Hence, Jones (2001: 219) suggests that “when we do philosophy, we must in some sense, epistemically outreach ourselves”. The reason for this is because “philosophy transcends ...subgroups of the philosophers” (*ibid*).

A charitable interpretation of Jones would allude to evidence that the practitioners of philosophy are deeply embedded in historical facts and are attended by cultural contingencies. This, therefore, has an implication for our traditions of philosophy. I am of the view that Jones himself would not deny this interpretation. But Jones would like to caution that the fact that the practitioners of philosophy and to some extent philosophy itself, are deeply embedded in historical and cultural contingencies that entail that philosophy must be locked in these cultural contingencies or history. These contingencies should not form a basis for reducing the universality of philosophy. All in all, philosophy should help analyze and address questions that concern all human beings. With regards to Vico’s experience Jones notes that:

An alternative response to the realization that intellectual endeavors are narrowly informed stems from recognizing that this realization is itself a universal claim ... a deep and potentially insightful claim about the nature of human beings (2001: 221).

Jones position is in contrasts to Eze's conception of the lessons that can be drawn from Vico’s analysis. History and culture have been understood as the source of philosophical questions where *epistemically outreaching* can be realized, in search of truths that are universal.

Perhaps the experience of the researcher will underscore this point. I am, for example, contingently a boy from Maniini village that is situated in Thohoyandou, Limpopo province, South Africa, I speak Venda, a bit of Zulu and English, a son of an uneducated women etc. But when I wear my philosopher's hat, I disregard a number of proxies, the aim for me at that point in time, was to seek to do with humanity beyond those contingencies that I mostly experience in my daily life. However, there is a problem as we cannot escape the fact that our lived experience is essentially particular, in a sense that we cannot escape our permanent spatio-temporality and all its attendant contingencies. Philosophy begins when thought transcends the particularity of human existence. So, philosophy practitioners are those who are "universalizing as thoroughly situated persons" (Jones, 2001: 219).

In view of the foregoing, Jones (2001: 217) notes that philosophy as we know it, asks "deep questions about ourselves as human beings". This points to the idea that philosophy asks deep questions about all human beings. He offers an example by way of a rhetorical question to substantiate his claim thus, "How should human beings treat each other" (*ibid*). This is an ethical question, and it concerns itself with how we ought to treat, not a Zulu person or an Indian woman, but any human being. This question concerns itself with "deep ethical questions" about all human beings (*ibid*).

The second reason is concerned with the method of doing philosophy. Jones notes that philosophy is entirely an "armchair" intellectual practice or activity (Jones, 2001: 217). Since the questions asked in philosophy and by a practitioner of philosophy are deep questions about human beings *qua* human, it makes sense that one would require a reflection-based approach that ultimately transcends this, and that attempts to reach universal conclusions about *the* human condition. This and that experience are a good starting point, but to affect a transition to reach beyond our place and its contingencies, we are required to rely on the light of reason, a property possessed by all human beings, to guide us to the universal truths. Having established this point, Jones' claims about African philosophy as a philosophical tradition are dubious in nature. Although I have attempted to offer a charitable interpretation of Jones' thought so as to save his philosophical bankruptcy, it is not feasible as there are other claims that are beyond rehabilitation like a fruitful endeavour of engagement between the analytical philosophy and African philosophy. This is because, it will only happen under

the condition where African philosophy has matured (Jones, 2001). It is from these claims that many philosophers like Matolino find objectionable.

Jones' universalism, according to Matolino, is constituted by a defense of the ultra-faithful and the anti-import. Jones' universalism contends that for philosophy to be universal, it should make claims about all human beings. Jones concurs with Eze's characterization of philosophy as transcendental in character. Jones' conception of philosophy as transcendental is explained as follows:

Philosophy transcends divisions between persons because it is about all persons, and not about any particular sub-unit of persons. It may concern itself with cultures in general, or with nations or countries in general, but it does not concern itself with particular cultures or particular nations (2001: 217).

Jones offers a reason for this the wide scope that philosophy engages in, as it is concerned with questions that pertain to all human beings. He further argues that “questions are really about metaphysics of humans, how language works and how humans should treat each other” (Matolino, 2015: 437).

On this note, Jones writes:

This last question is of considerable importance in this context: discussing racism, sexism, and xenophobia is not merely to examine how particular types of people treat each other, but to delve into deep ethical issues concerning how all human beings should treat each other. Addressing bias in thought and deed must be undertaken with a background of commitment to universal claims about human beings as a group (2001: 217).

Thus, this betrays Jones' commitments theoretically, as Matolino observed. Matolino (2015: 437) is of view that Jones is not sensitive to specificities, hence, he argues that “it is clear that Jones perpetuates a pretence that ignores specificities”. Matolino (*ibid*) accuses Jones of seeking to maintain the “universal fiction of how humans are grounded in the same metaphysics and hence, must be treated with the same sort of regard”. He further acknowledged that it “disingenuous on Jones' part ...[to]...ignore evidence from philosophy and philosophers who have insisted on the different metaphysical system based on their own philosophical adventures about this or that fact of this or that human being” (Matolino, 2015: 437).

Unfortunately, the most reputable philosophers like Hume and Kant form part of those philosophers who have actually taken this position to an amplified level. These philosophers, like Hegel, held strong views about black people regarding the unequalness of their metaphysical status. In their inquiry, Hume and Kant had sought to unpack and characterize the essential properties that would offer explanations on the differences that exist between races. Although Hume' and Kant's racism is condemnable, and has no worthy instructive content, a deeper look into their position will show two crucial things. Firstly, the universal nature of humanity is not easily guaranteed; and secondly, the conditions that people live under have a great effect on the development of their character (*ibid*).

The foregoing seems to suggest that Matolino is worried about how the nature of humanity can be universal and the conditions that the people live under are a great factor that needs to be considered when talking about universality. Hence, Matolino observes that the mere fact that the ultra-faithful insist on the pretence of universality is because conditions that they live in are mostly widely used. Matolino contrarily argues that the "... [Jones' universalism] falls away as the conditions that people live in are widely varied". We cannot shy away from the fact that people are mostly concerned with their specific conditions, and it is these conditions that inform their experiences. It is in their reflection that "they will decide whether those conditions are the best, worst, acceptable or to be rejected for some other position" (Matolino, 2015: 437-8). "Those conditions force a reckoning on the particular people who experience those conditions and that will give a different form of reflection from that of another different set of people under a different set of circumstances" (Matolino, 2015: 438).

Matolino notes that Jones can offer a rebuttal to his argument of recognition of specificities, and can propose that the notion of 'justice' is a universal phenomenon that exists across cultures. Matolino (2015: 438) contends that, as much as, "it is a desirability, it is applicable to all humanity". But Jones would have missed a salient point in the opinion of Matolino, who claims that "the salient point is that the notion of justice will be interpreted differently and will be given different articulation by specific people". He further contends that what some can conceive to be the height of "justice", others might

conceive the same as nothing or even recognize it as such.

Jones' other reason for claiming that philosophy has a universal scope is associated with the methodology of doing philosophy. For Jones, philosophy is an armchair intellectual endeavour that proceeds from nature and seeks to answer general questions about humanity. Matolino (2015: 438) noted that:

[Jones]... had conceded that even though 'ultra-faithful' philosophy transcends divisions, the philosophers themselves must not think that they transcend such divisions. For this, he also welcomes the growth of African philosophy as it may instruct the 'ultra-faithful' of other views. For this, he also suggests that the 'ultra-faithful' must not disagree with Eze's 'anti-importer' position. However, he insists that whatever Africans will be doing is essentially about the human condition.

This is, as Matolino puts it, a defense of the combination of the ultra-faithful and anti-import. For the purpose of clarity, it would be worthwhile to revisit the two positions. The ultra-faithful hold that "African philosophy is nonexistent because there is only one, universal, discipline of philosophy" (Eze, 2001: 207). While on the other hand, the anti-import position holds that "Cross-culturality and interdisciplinarity need not imply a unilateral exporting of the 'analytic' tradition to 'African' philosophy. Theories, instead, should be able to flow from one place to another precisely because no one culture or tradition of inquiry has a monopoly on the production of knowledge¹⁸" (Eze, 2001: 209). Matolino does not think that Jones' defense of the combination of these two positions is convincing. Matolino contends that the latter's position actually challenges the former. Hence, he writes, "I think there are good reasons as to why Eze separates these positions as well as why he sees the latter as a challenge to the former" (Matolino, 2015: 438). There are no ways with which we can conceive of these positions as harmonious as they are not commensurate with each other.

According to Matolino (2015: 438), a true Universalist seeks to learn more about others'

¹⁸ It worthwhile for the purpose of understanding to note that the manuscripts of Jones are not only full of theoretical controversial claims about the universality of philosophy or how philosophy is universal. In this manuscript not only does Jones offer to defend a combination of ultra-faithful and anti-import that is dubious in nature, but his characterization of Eze's anti-import position is too simplistic and because of this simplistic take he failed to apprehend the sophistication of this position and how it seems like they are incongruent to it each other. Jones reading of Eze is problematic as even his quotation is misleading because of his lack of care in referencing the accurate pages of the original words. I wonder what the cause of these puerile errors are.

systems and systems of thoughts. But on the other hand, Jones' universalism that is heavily guided by the ultra-faithful position, yearns to disparage the other systems of thought. This skepticism and dismissal of other philosophical thoughts arises from the claims that "whatever Africans will be doing is essentially about the human condition" (*ibid*). Matolino (2015: 438) concedes that "Jones' claim is true but only in a weak sense". But this cannot be extended to infer that there is nothing universal that they are dealing with. In the context of, for example, apartheid, racism, colonial legacy, oppression and absence of democracy, philosophical thoughts about Africans can be conceived as efforts to improve humanity as we know it, and this has some connection with what has happened in North American experiences. Matolino (*ibid*) avers that "[he]... wonders what the common humanity would be between a philosopher who belongs to the camp of the oppressor, and one who belongs to the camp of the oppressed". Behind Jones' argument of dismissal of African philosophy, a tradition that has attained the status of philosophy qua philosophy, is the idea that African philosophy is not a mature philosophy. On this, Matolino (*ibid*) poses some questions:

1. What is a mature philosophy?
2. When does a philosophy get considered mature?
3. What is the formula for attaining maturity?
4. Whose philosophy is mature, e.g. Socrates versus Appiah?
5. What is a nature of African philosophy? What is Jones' understanding of mature stuff? Is it akin to my understanding of a mature date versus a high school date?

On this serious question, Matolino charges Jones that he should at least better articulate what a mature philosophy would look like. In this regard, Matolino is asking Jones to provide an outlook of a mature philosophy without which, he will dispatch his claims that African philosophy is not mature. Matolino concedes that any attempt to answer these questions will not promote African philosophy, as "an analytical philosophy its equal but it will seek to affirm or speak directly to the practice of analytical philosophy" (*ibid*).

In conclusion, as much as he takes issue with Jones' universalism, Matolino had sought to argue that Jones' universalism is faulty. But his arguments are not aimed at "necessarily [toning] down the whole project of universalism" (Matolino, 2015: 440). But it aims at critiquing universalism that disregards differences that exist between people and to some

extent in their philosophies. Matolino (2015: 440) is of the view that the universalism perspective of philosophy that accommodates real differences that exist between people and their philosophies stands a better chance than Jones' universalism that is informed by the ultra-faithful position. In the view of Matolino, the ultra-faithful position not only blurs the history of philosophy only consisting of analytical philosophy, it also rejects other philosophical traditions. Matolino argues that Jones ignores that analytical philosophy is just a mere fibre of the history of philosophy, and not the history of philosophy itself. Jacques Derrida (1994: 310), on the history of philosophy, contends that "philosophy does not have one sole memory. Under its Greek name and in its European memory, it has always been bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear and polyglot"¹⁹. He even further ignores that the method of philosophizing was not naturally an analytic method. Philosophy, as Matolino (2015: 440) puts it, "is strictly a reflection of human life and that life is lived differently under different circumstances". Even those concepts that are considered universal like racism, justice, philosophy, etc, would receive different interpretations from culture to culture; from people to people; person to person. Finally, Matolino (*ibid*) contends that the conversations between different traditions might hold a good prospect of giving birth to an authentic form of universalism.

In the first section of this chapter, the study offered two-fold reasons in respect of the analysis of the debate between the Universalists and Particularists. The researcher suggested that their debate seems to be more than just the debate about the problems of methodology in doing African philosophy. The first reason contends that there is a metaphysical implication of the relationship between the universals and particular of the concrete objects and concepts. It has been argued that the origin of the debate of the problems of universals was about the relationship between the universal and the particular in concrete objects. The second reason, as to reemphasize, is that most philosophical scholars who have analyzed the debate between the Universalists and Particularists will note that at the center of this debate, is the concept of philosophy and how best can it be construed as universal or particular.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida. 1994. Of the Humanities and Philosophical Discipline: The Right to Philosophy from the Cosmopolitan point of view, *Surfaces*, 4(1), 310. (Accessed on May 15, 2019).

I have presented, so far, the views of scholars who conceive the debate of the problem of universals as a metaphysical question. Wiredu offers a realist argument for his cultural universals. For Wiredu, universals are based on human nature but particulars stem from the contingency of variations of cultures. Wiredu (1983: 122) defines “universal as what is general, and what is general is what can be instantiated”. The characteristic of something whether an object or entity, can be an instance but unable to be instantiated, that feature is called a ‘particular’. Wiredu is of the view that universals exist by virtue of them being conceptual in nature and they are intelligible across cultures. Wiredu introduced his argument in defense of the existence of universal through the *reductio ad absurdum*. In his argument Wiredu writes:

Suppose there were no cultural universals. Then intercultural communication would be impossible. But there is intercultural communication. Therefore, there are cultural universals (1996: 21).

On this note, Wiredu had hoped to show that there is a possibility of this communication being feasible amongst different cultures that rests on the fact that we share some commonality foundation metaphysically. Amplifying his argument, Wiredu makes “...reference to John Dewey who indicates that biology refers to the way organisms act and interact” (Janz, 2009: 133-4). Bruce Janz, a current leading African philosopher, has several reservations with Wiredu’s realist position on the notion of cultural universals, and the basis which was used to ground his cultural universals.

Wiredu accounts for the possibility of universality of thought through human instinct and actions. Even though different cultures seem to possess various degrees of relativity, what unifies us as human beings is more fundamental than our existing differences. Wiredu predicates his thought of unity amongst human beings on the fact that we are all a family of *Homo sapiens*. The family of *Homo sapiens* implies:

This ... status of being a human person, implies that man has more than instinct in the drive for equilibrium and self- preservation... [In other words,] being a human person implies having the capacity of reflective perception, abstraction, deduction and induction. In their basic nature, these mental capacities are the same for all humans; irrespective of whether they inhabit Europe, Asia or Africa, (Wiredu, 1996: 23).

Wiredu (*ibid*) further argues that, there is a need for *homo sapiens* to go past instinct and

compliment it with “wits in their struggle for equilibrium and self-preservation”. There are some reservations, with an eye to exposing the weakness of grounding cultural universals, with inference from the discipline of biology, as Wiredu has posited as basis for his universalism, and also that we all share biology with animals. But Janz notes that this does undermine Wiredu’s submission of biology as the basis of universals, as universals are accessible to the mind, “that is what makes us uniquely human” (Janz, 2009: 134). From Plato’s conception of universals, Janz notes that the lower will have to ground the higher. As argued above, Plato considers that universals are of higher level than the metaphysical scheme of things, while, human is considered of a lower level in the metaphysical scheme of things, as Janz puts it. Janz (2009: 134) argues that universals were not grounded in any features of human existence in the mediaeval era. Janz (*ibid*) argues that “the problem is not that this is a logically inconsistent move, but it cannot be coherently defended, and it cannot serve the purpose for which it is intended”.

Janz scrutinizes the purpose of Wiredu’s use of Dewey’s biological theory. Janz, on this account, argues that “...Dewey’s theory of biology is not only available” (*ibid*). The reasons that Janz offers so as to substantiate his discrediting Dewey’s theory of biology, is that there is a false “...connection between biological and intellectual” (*ibid*). Wiredu seems to assume that the connection between biology and the intellect is a given fact. But Janz invokes Maurice Merleau-Ponty who extensively worries about the connection between the behaviour and the self. It is on this account that Janz contends that “biology may lead us to see our experience in world as very particular, perhaps mediated by social or cultural factors, certainly not universal” (*ibid*). Janz uses the phenomenon of ‘death’ as an example to illustrate his point. Janz (*ibid*) writes:

One might try to refer to seeming common experiences as death, but even here there is interpretation. For some, it is a passage to another life, and experienced as such. For others, it is the annihilation of self. For still others, it is rest after a life of toil.

What is visible, in the above quotation, is that there is no metaphysical consensus on the fate that the phenomenon of death holds for different people, and does not show the commonalities that Wiredu might wish to secure. In different cultures, death might mean ‘passage [to] another life’ or ‘annihilation of self’ or ‘a rest after a life of toil’. These different

perspectives threaten the cultural universality that Wiredu seeks to secure through the metaphysical realist argument. Hence, Janz argues that “it [is] difficult to imagine what kind of basis, biology might provide cultural universals, if biology itself cannot be seen as universal”.

Janz makes mention of Eze’s criticism of Wiredu’s biological basis of his universalism. Eze’s criticism of Wiredu focuses on the question of the nature of instincts that underlie his biological basis for cultural universals. In his book review of Wiredu’s book *Cultural universal and particular*, Eze argues that there are some limitations to the biological foundation of communication. Eze (1998) further argues that the route to cultural universals is not through biology but through culture itself. Janz (2009: 135), for his part, argues that “we cannot, in short, have a ‘universal representation of the universal’”. Eze, in turn, argues that the issue does not really concern the idea of the existence of cultural universal but rather concrete communication itself. Janz (2009), on this note, argues that several candidates have been presented as universal, while in fact they are not. Eze (1998) argues that Wiredu’s list of universals was used by Europeans to marginalize Africans. The list of universal that Wiredu proposes is logic, non-contradiction, induction, categorical imperative and we can add intuition. While Janz (2009: 135) has observed that Oruka has added ‘intuition’ in Wiredu’s list of universals, and had endorsed the addition. Hence, I married ‘intuition’ in to Wiredu’s list of universals.

The insistence of Wiredu’s referral to communication as the observable common factor between cultures is faulty. Wiredu’s assumption is that communication is the observable fact between cultures that can undergird the phenomenon of universal. Janz (2009: 135) is of view that “[Wiredu’s]...assumption that communication occurs is incorrect. Janz (2009: 135) suggests that, what actually occurs is not communication but ‘talk’. The reason for this claim is that communication, as Jurgen Habermas puts it, is systematically distorted by technological forces. Janz (2009: 136) further admitted that even in situations where communication occurs in some minimal level, “for example, the level of talk about basic human activities, this still does not mean that communication about philosophical issues or political identities can occur”.

The nature of the universals is unclear. Besides, the analysis of Wiredu's universalism that was offered through the *reductio ad absurdum* suffers from the problem of being unclear after the proper investigation of its grounding. This study notes that Wiredu might insist that the universal is held at the level of culture, and not at the individual level. Janz, on this note, says that the only interpretation that can be offered in the light of this, is that cultural universals should have been components of culture that individuals must share in common. What is visible, is that it is not cultures that are moral or immoral, neither do cultures that have intuition, but individuals.

Janz poses a question, what does it mean for universals to exist at the level of culture? Does it mean that every culture necessarily has certain basic components, and by reason of this, is there the possibility of comparison and communication? Wiredu takes the basis of communication to be 'intuition'. Janz (2009: 140) observes that "Oruka makes an addition to Wiredu's list of cultural universals, including intuition. Wiredu essentially agrees with this addition". According to Janz (2009: 140), one thing to note is that intuition is a notoriously ambiguous concept. But what is good, as Janz (*ibid*) puts it, is that Oruka used them as a form of mental skills that help the mind to reason from experience to establish inductive truths.

However, Janz (2009: 141) alleges that any talk of cultural universals in terms of intuition misses Husserl's basic insight that we are able to secure any external objects apart from through the experience of the inquirer. Any talks like this, capture the idea that the debate is fundamentally about the existence of universals that can be realized through the empirical evidence. But this will cause this debate to be about the realism and idealism. "It is not the question of whether universals have a real existence in mind of themselves, or are contents of someone's mind, or are created by many minds. All these are also metaphysical positions, and detract from the real question: what is the experience that we are labelling a cultural universal?" (Janz, 2009: 141).

Janz identifies another problem that Wiredu's universalism faces which is that he assumes that the issue in communication is the transference of the concepts from one culture to another or from one language to the next. But he is cautious to avoid "presupposing any particular theory about the ontological nature of concepts" (Wiredu, 1996: 82). It is clear that concepts

do have ontological status. “Be that as it may, it is not necessarily true that concepts are transferred from one language to another at all. It is possible, following from Heidegger’s position, to see concepts as later reflections and abstractions on lived experience” (Janz, 2009: 142).

In view of the foregoing analysis of Wiredu’s universalism and its biological basis, one can note that the metaphysical grounding for cultural interaction will be not feasible and even the attempt to seek for the mental attribution that is universally held will be impossible as there is no concept that is universally shared in terms of their meanings. “The first turns out to be incoherent, and the second, even if one assents to the universality of certain capabilities of the mind, will not be enough to guarantee commonality without bringing in intentionality, at which point the question is shifted from human capabilities and their objects, to human experience” (*ibid*). Now, as Janz argues, this shows that there are fundamental problems that arise when one seeks to ground universal through metaphysics. Hence, Janz (2009: 147) argues that “we might ask whether there is anything universal that could resist the barriers to communication.” Janz further argued, that universal cannot be thought of as metaphysical, or for that matter epistemological. It will not be a capability of the mind, or a concept that is held by everyone, and it will not be a cultural universal, rooted in biology or anywhere else”.

The analysis that the researcher has offered thus far, might seem to be concerned with the question that is incongruent with the central concern of the current thesis. It is true, as Janz reiterates, that Wiredu’s analysis was to attempt to find the basis for communication between cultures. Meanwhile, the current study is concerned with the question of whether philosophical ideas are particular, or they are universal. One lesson, from the analysis that is offered by Janz of Wiredu’s universals that needs to be taken seriously is that, universals do not have a credible basis in metaphysics. It seems like any account of universals that relies on metaphysics might end up with a questionable position regarding universals. Janz seems to suggest that there is a need for us to go past this characterization of things. Hence, he argues that “cultural universals will not successfully meet these objectives” (Janz, 2009: 146). This is because, according to him, “they do not form a coherent basis for communication, they are not able to address the possibility that communication is systematically distorted, and their existence is open to question” (Janz, 2009: 146). One can suggest that even the basis of the

concept philosophy and its ideas on metaphysics so as to attain their universality might even end up with a questionable position of universals [Janz (2009: 131-145) had done enough to make this point in his analysis of Wiredu's universalism]. At the center of this analysis is our conception of universalism and what can be considered to be universals.

Janz (2009) argues that there is the possibility that communication can actually occur without revoking metaphysics in the arguments. At the background of arguments that required metaphysical considerations, was the perpetual self-identity and the issue of the power dynamics amongst Western and African philosophy. But if we can consider that we are all equals, there will not be stakeholders who will insist on taking their thoughts as superior and also insist on universalizing their particulars. If these considerations are taken seriously, then some sense of dialogue could actually occur that can lead to a meaningful philosophical consideration. Janz (2009: 147), on this matter, contends that "perhaps the key is to recognize that the universal is the result of dialogical reflection, not the presupposition of it". Contrary to Wiredu's position on universals, Janz (*ibid*) argues that "universals do not make conversation possible, but they do form the goal of conversation". I will return to this matter later on in the chapter. But it seems like there are fundamental problems that the debate between the universalism and particularism faces by the introduction of Janz' consideration of the formulation of the questions around the problem of universals in African philosophy. It will not be a category mistakes to make a claim that Janz has a problem with universals and has opted for the route of bypassing them.

Likewise, there is a demise of philosophical universalism²⁰. The reason for this is that, there is no need for continuing "...such a philosophical posturing supported by the universalist mantra" (Chimakonam, 2018: 135). Chimakonam (2018: 135) noted that the "low point of the universalist school hereinafter referred to doctrinally as philosophical universalism is that,

²⁰ I am of view that by the term 'philosophical universalism', Chimakonam (2018), seems to be referring to the debate of universals in African philosophy. I think the scope is not universal but is limited to African philosophical discussion on what sets of philosophical ideas can be universalised or taken as universal in nature. Put simply, philosophical universalism refers to African philosophical discussions over ideas that can be universalized or seen as universal in nature. Hence, in his attempt to clarify what philosophical universalism is, He quoted Bodunrin (1984: 2) who describes philosophical universalism as "work of many trained philosophers. Many of them reject the assumptions of ethnophilosophy and take a universalist view of philosophy. Philosophy, many of them argue, must have the same meaning in all cultures...."

it seeks to prove the point that African philosophy could be done like the European philosophy”. The debate between the Universalists and Particularism was informed by the previously stated line of thought. This derailed them from actually philosophizing and talking about philosophizing. Hence, Janz (2009) contends that African philosophers should move past the burden of justification as to whether African philosophy existed or not. He further contends that this debate is myopic (Janz, 2009: 11). There is the need for the demise of philosophical universalism as the insistence of this position will amount to nothing much, but just a derailed project. Another reason for the need to bypass philosophical universalism, as Chimakonam (2018: 138) puts it, is what can be called a metaphilosophical vicious circle. Similarly, Okonda Okolo (1991: 201) calls it an ‘unproductive criticism’ about the question whether African philosophy exists. Janz and Chimakonam would agree with the interpretation that they are actually making a call for doing philosophy rather than talking about the process of philosophizing.

3.3. Conversational Philosophy

From the foregoing, the researcher had sought to show that there are some weaknesses of philosophical universalism and on this account, had argued that there is a need for African philosophers to go past this debate as they amount to nothing much and they are also myopic. What is inevitable, after recognizing that there is no need to talk about philosophizing, is what form of philosophical conversation African philosophers will have. In simple and clear sense, African philosophers in their quest to establish a philosophy that would attain global recognition, fall in the theoretical trap of been bogged down with the question that has led them to come up with a philosophy that is transcultural in nature. But the transcultural considerations will amount to nothing much, but the question of which style of philosophizing is more appealing than the other. This set of questions suffers criticism like any philosophy that concerns itself with transcultural philosophy or philosophy that goes past culture and that will affirm European philosophy. That is, simply stated, is just a mode of affirming that their form of knowledge and thought is more appealing than others. This fits well with the framework of imperialism where monopoly of knowledge production had been skewed towards a particular culture rather than others. Hence, in response to this philosophical gap in African philosophy, Janz (2009; 2015) and Chimakonam (2015) propose that the

alternative to this problem is conversational philosophy. What is visible, in literature, is that conversational philosophy did not originate with Chimakonam in African philosophy, but at the dawn of the new millennium, when this orientation began. The conversational philosophy engages in a rigorous dialogue between African philosophers and others interested in similar matters of phenomenological issues. Conversational philosophy does not adopt the cultural African mode of thought simplistically, but it engages in a rigorous analysis of that thought (Chimakonam, 2018). The space in which conversational philosophy occurs has been stipulated by the following diagram as envisaged by Chimakonam:

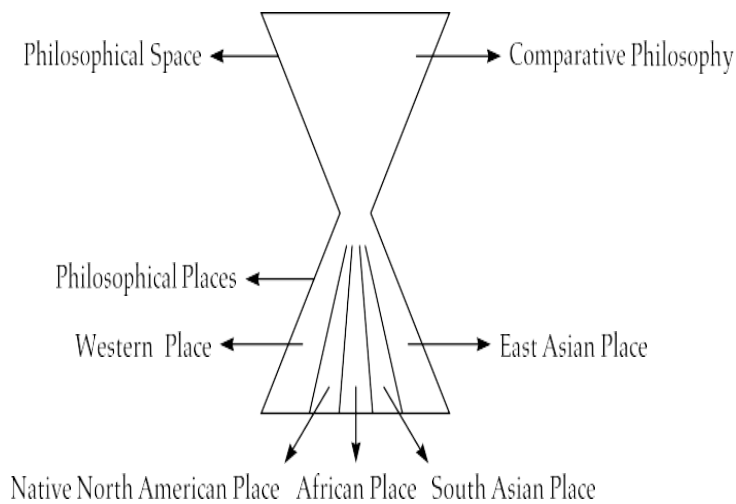


Figure 1: Chimakonam envisaged space and place where conversational philosophy occurs

The above figure represents a space where conversational philosophy can potentially occur, given the willingness of other philosophical traditions that are ready to make conversations about the phenomenological issues concerning one thought or the others unfolding from concepts. Conversational philosophy is more than a dialogue, is an encounter between proponents and opponents to engage in contestations of ideas and thoughts (Chimakonam, 2015: 20). The justification of conversational philosophy, as offered by Chimakonam (2015: 21), is that it “does not blindly apply Western modes of thought in analyzing African issues”. He argues that “actors must therefore note that by conversational philosophy, we do not mean critical engagements between African philosophers in a simplistic sense, rather, we mean to say that these tools of textual criticism, rigor, analysis, and the sundry modern philosophical tools employed have been Africanized such that in applying them, we

designate an Africa mode of thought” (*ibid*). He further contends that the idea of “critical analysis in African philosophy does not only imply fault-finding” (*ibid*). This researcher is of the view that Chimakonam is acutely aware of the criticisms that certain African philosophers, who are only in the business of fault-finding, have put forward, without any process of “reconstruction” of African traditional thought that will have something significant to bring to the philosophical space where conversational philosophy occurs. “In other words, when we employ critical analysis in African philosophy, we aim at the final lap of the exercise to reconstruct faulty areas, and not just to identify them. This is because the edifice of African episteme has yet to form a mountain, hence any part that is destroyed must be rebuilt” (*ibid*). Finally, Chimakonam (2015: 22) argues that by conversational philosophy he means a “...rigorous engagement of individual African philosophers with one another, or their works, in the creation of critical narratives using an African mode of thought”.

The geography of philosophy does not lead to ethnophilosophy. Placing philosophy in a geography suggests that it has contingent but not arbitrary interests, that it responds to and shapes a particular set of conditions of reflection. It is the contention of this study that philosophy must attend to the conditions in which its questions arise, and that this attention does not diminish philosophy traditional (Chimakonam, 2015: 22).

3.3.1 Debate on Philosophical Space

The main contestations amongst many scholars such as between Janz (2016) and Chimakonam (2015) is on the concept of space, and that is where conversational philosophy is said to take place. Chimakonam (2015) argues that there is some crude development of the concept of philosophical space by Janz. On this account, Janz concurs with Chimakonam’s analysis. But to some extent, a philosophical space had been developed, as Janz (2016: 46) reiterates. The reason for his lack of attention to the concept of space, is that we should not prioritize it as in a situation when we begin with analyzing the concept of ‘place’ we can actual arrive at the concept of ‘space’. So, in simply put, the concept of place comes first and space later. In view of this, Chimakonam accuses Janz of offering a simplistic version of space. Janz (2016: 46) contends that he “...did not develop sufficiently the concept of spatial philosophy as such, but the dynamics between platial and spatial philosophy”. In his attempt to deal with the criticism of Chimakonam, Janz (*ibid*) resuscitated the “binary between an approach to intellectual

geography which started from abstractions, and one which started from a phenomenology of place”. He contends that this binary is still useful, but as it stands, it is a bit too simplistic. He further argues that Chimakonam’s analysis of the binary was a bit crudely drawn. What is inevitable is that space will always be secondary and derivative (Janz, 2016). Janz (2016: 46) is of the view that as much as Chimakonam is correct on his criticism there is no need to be hasty to “simply rehabilitate philosophical space in the figure 1 sketched it earlier”.

Janz is interested in accounting to the question of the relationship between space and place. And he is aware that answering that question will require deep reflection (*ibid*). These reflections are not simply just an abstract preoccupation of a philosopher to the “precondition for African philosophy, as it has been in the past, it is then the space of contestation where philosophical place can work out its implications” (*ibid*). “Is this, then, that a space itself has no place, where concepts born in philosophical places come to engage each other? Is there any such space?” (*ibid*).

The philosophical space that Chimakonam seems to aim at, is the agonistic space. But Janz is of view, that there are other options that can be used to arrive at the agonistic space. Place, according to Janz (*ibid*), “is more than that, and a phenomenology of place requires that we be able to recognize not only that there are multiple lifeworlds within the same physical geography, but also that those lifeworlds might be embodied by the same people simultaneously”. The reason for this position, as Janz (*ibid*) offers it, “was to identify the ways in which places were not just versions of an Aristotelean topos, in which place operates like a skin or layer which can be exchanged by objects as they move”. Chimakonam envisages that there has to be a possibility of an encounter and engagement in the space. Janz prefers dialogue to conversation. Hence, he argues that dialogue is a prerequisite of philosophy. If it’s a prerequisite of philosophy, then conversational philosophy will not do without the concept of dialogue. Janz argues that the fact that places are not sealed units, entails that borders are porous. The mere fact that borders are porous entails that any possible encounters have greater potential for formulating new concepts.

In this section, I have attempted to show an alternative route that African philosophy could take as philosophical tradition. I am aware that my analysis is somewhat crude in this aspect.

The reason for this is simply that current study does not focus on this alternative route, but it is worried about the impasse that has been created by the debate between the Universalists and Particularists in African philosophy. I am aware that it can be argued that this is a solution to the problem of universals in African philosophy that I have, so far, set up. But it will be unfair for academic development and analysis to just endorse this solution without attempting to suggest some of the feasible solutions to the impasse or dichotomy. In making conclusive remarks for this section, it is relevant, for the purpose of provoking future inquiry, to recall the remarks of Chimakonam who said that “we must therefore shun intellectual cowardice and engage the other, rather than staying in our enclosed world and dangerously assuming that others are not worth talking to, that we are self-sufficient, that reason has its abode in our place, that the sanctity of our place must not be polluted or violated”.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter had sought to portray that there is a rejoinder, in some sense, to the debate that had concerned itself with the question of universals in African philosophy. In this chapter it has been argued that there are some good prospects of the relationship between analytical philosophy and African philosophy. What needs to be known is that, when analytical philosophy takes an interest in some of the affairs of the African people, it will not lose its universal status. Matolino on the same matter, argues slightly differently from the position held by Eze, who contends that there is a need for analytical philosophy to worry about African affairs, as they are human affairs. Failure to adhere to this call, Matolino describes any scholars who have refrained from this endeavour, as false Universalists. A true Universalist is one who seeks to learn more from others’ systems of thought than one who projects his system of thought as the only thought that is systematized (Matolino, 2015). This argument was put forward by Matolino in his criticism of Jones’ universalism. In this chapter I further analyzed the basis of Wiredu’s universalism through Janz’s perception that the debate of universalism is more complex than that which other philosophy scholars have propounded. In this analysis, it has been argued that Wiredu’s universalism that is based on the human’s biology cannot be used as a basis of universals. One can note that the metaphysical grounding for cultural interaction will not be feasible, and even the attempt to

seek for the mental attribution that is universally held will be impossible as there is no concept that is universally shared in terms of their meanings. “We might ask whether there is anything universal that could resist the barriers to communication, as [he] has argued, that universal cannot be thought of as metaphysical, or for that matter epistemological. It will not be a capability of the mind, or a concept that is held by everyone, and it will not be a cultural universal, rooted in biology or anywhere else” (Janz, 2009: 147). In order to show that there are some parallel but related discussion in African philosophy, the researcher hinted at the alternative route that African philosophy can take as a philosophical tradition as proposed by Janz and Chimakonam. These philosophers are of the view that conversational philosophy can be an integral alternative route to the problems that African philosophy had faced in the past. This can be feasible when African philosophy is taken as equal to any other system of thought that exists in the world.

Chapter Four

The Concept of Philosophy: An Analysis of the debate in African Philosophy

4. Introduction

As a reminder, the previous chapters have dealt with the question of universals in Western and African philosophy²¹. Specifically, the three previous chapters have established that at the center of the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists is the concept of philosophy. What these debates had opted to demonstrate is quite complex, as I have argued above. The complexity of this lies in the fact that there are several questions that are of interest around the question of ‘universals’ in African philosophy’s conversation with its Western counterparts and itself. The debate between the Western - and those who are of the view that African thought cannot be granted philosophical status and African philosophers lies in the question can African traditional thought be granted a philosophy status? Amongst the reason that Western philosophers provide to dismiss African traditional thought as a philosophy, is that philosophy is universal and any set of thoughts that do not conform to the standards of logical analysis and argumentation should not be accepted as a philosophical tradition. Misconception has been demonstrated that exists amongst some African philosophers who believe that the Universalist’s thesis of African philosophy fosters a Western view on the non-existence of African philosophy that entails that African thought cannot attain the status of philosophy. I have argued that there is a problem with African philosophers who believe that the Universalists are perpetuating European’s philosophical thought, and the imperialism of dominating the knowledge production. I have shown that this position is simply a crystal strawman as there are no Universalists or African philosophers who can be categorized as Universalists, who would argue that African philosophy does not exist. Those philosophers are acutely aware of the implications of making that claim, as making that claim will affirm the

²¹ The research makes the assumption that any philosophy scholars will not argue against the fact that there is a rich literature in the debates around the concept and nature of philosophy in African context. Hence, I will draw on some of the philosophical insights in terms of the concept of philosophy from various periods in African philosophical tradition to make articulate the central point of this chapter.

assumptions of Western philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Hume and many who have argued that an African person does not have the capacity to rationalize. It is incontestable that the Universalists are of the view that an African person does have the capacity to rationalize or in a simple sense, like any other human being does possess the capacity to rationalize. Hence, the Universalists, to mention a few, Hountondji, Bodunrin, Wiredu, have spent more time of their careers attempting to account to the question of how we can ground the notion of universal in philosophy? or what set of things is universal about the notion of philosophy? As a result, it is now visible that there are several problems that arise when the notion of universal is associated with philosophy.

I have argued above that at the center of the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists, is the concept of philosophy. Hence, it has been argued that there are some set standards that need to be met for an intellectual activity to attain the status of ‘philosophy’ (Matolino, 2015); (Ikuenobe, 1997); (Hesein, 2010). For African philosophy to be called philosophy in a strict sense, there are set standards for it to meet, namely, universal, systematic, analytic, scientific and rigorous. Ikuenobe notes that “philosophy in this sense has the following features: i) it adopts rational, analytical, critical and systematic methods; ii) it uses the rigorous methods of science; iii) it has a written tradition that documents individual thoughts; and iv), it can be a universal discipline” (Ikuenobe, 2010: 246).

Wiredu conceives philosophy as “a theoretical discipline devoted to detailed and complicated arguments” (Wiredu, 1980: 32). The implication of Wiredu’s conception of philosophy starts from hinting that the debate between the Universalist and Particularist is more than just an issue on how African philosophers conceive themselves or to some extent, identify themselves. It is evident in literature, that what African philosophers, particularly, those who have been characterized on one hand as Universalist, and on the other hand, as Particularist, seek to account for, is the nature of philosophy. In a simple sense, what African philosophers seek to account for is the scope of African philosophy whether it is supposed to be taken as the universal or of particular scope.

If African philosophy as a philosophical tradition can accept the authoritarian from which it originates, it will suffer a lot of criticism and to some greater extent, like one of its early stages,

approach ethnophilosophy. On this point, Wiredu argues that “traditional conception of things just cannot provide an adequate basis for contemporary philosophy” (Wiredu, 1980: 32). He further argues that the best way by which contemporary African philosophy can be relevant as well as meet the condition of universality is to be critical of the older tradition (*ibid*).

The current chapter seeks to show that the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists has been taken to be incompatible. This incompatibility leads to a different conception of the nature of philosophy. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the implications of imagining philosophy as exclusively universal or particular. Simultaneously, this section will be showing that there is a visible incompatibility when philosophy is viewed as either universal or particular.

4.1. Inadequacy of Envisaging African Philosophy as purely Universal

This section seeks to articulate the problem of envisaging philosophy as purely universal. It will strictly point out some of the problems that can arise when imaging philosophy in an African context as purely universal. African philosophers who defend the thesis that philosophy is universal, are mostly of the view that philosophy uses a method of formal analysis by which it seeks to clarify meaning and problems by analyzing some complex problems. This formal analysis was oriented towards clarity and argumentation, often achieved through logical analysis of language (McGinn, 2002; see also Glock, 2004; Soames, 2003). On this point, Ikuenobe argues that “philosophy utilizes the method of formal analysis, and it seeks to clarify meaning, issues, and problems by analyzing complex language into its basic atomic forms and clarifying the ultimate structure of language as a picture of reality” (Ikuenobe, 2004: 480). The leading proponents of this view include philosophers like, Gottlob Frege, George E Moore, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Rudolf Carnap. Frege is said to be the father of analytical philosophy. While Moore commenced this tradition by his defense of common sense, Russell continued by renouncing the theory of the conception of analysis, logicism and logical atomism (Soames, 2003). Moore rejected idealism as he considered it to be an erroneous metaphysical view and if possible, we should return to realism. In his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein’s argued that philosophical problems arise from misunderstanding of

language. He defended the view that all necessary truths are a priori, analytic and true in virtue (Soames, 2003).

The views discussed above are mostly concerned with linguistic philosophy. To be precise, Russell and Wittgenstein emphasized the need to create an “ideal language for philosophical analysis, that can be unambiguous, and that makes philosophy invalid” (Glock, 2008: 36). Inspired by Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap sought to embed his analysis in logical positivism. Logical positivism, at this time, rejected the existence of philosophical truths, and suggested that the object of philosophy is logical clarification of thoughts (Soames, 2003). Inspired by J. Carnap, J. I Austin, and later P. F Strawson, rejected the dogmas of their predecessors who constructed artificial language to resolve philosophical problems. They argued that the Vienna Circle was erroneous because their “quest for systemic theories of language was a misguided intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy” (Glock, 2008: 44). Finally, they argued that we need to return to the views of some philosophical questions that are genuine and hope the analysis of language will deliver answers to some of those questions (Glock, 2008). This analytical tradition is known as ordinary language philosophy. According to Glock (2008: 52), ordinary language philosophers are interested in the workings of the actual languages rather than the constructions of artificial ones, as their predecessors had suggested.

Soames (2003) argues that “argumentative clarity” is important, and that this can be achieved through logical argumentation and “conceptual analysis”. Soames’ logical positivism is in line with his understanding and perception of analytical philosophy. Soames (2003) argues that in analytical philosophy “argumentative clarity” is quite vital. The assumption that arises from this statement is that ‘argumentative clarity’ is mostly useful in the process of philosophical analysis. Hence, Universalists in African philosophy are of the view that ‘argumentative clarity’ will be quite useful and should form part of African philosophy. This concept is closer to Gyekye’s definition of philosophy. Gyekye sees philosophy as “a conceptual response to the problems posed in any given epoch for a given society. It is therefore appropriate, even imperative, for contemporary African philosophers to grapple at the conceptual level with the problems and issues of their times, not least of which, are the problems of government and political stability” (1992: 239). At the heart of Gyekye’s definition is a conceptual response to ‘human problems’ that arises from human conditions. The conceptual exercise is an essential

characteristic of philosophical activity on the basis of which Ikuenobe proposes, that “some of the *analysans* that are considered essential characteristics of philosophy are: 1) dealing with conceptual and abstract questions and issues; 2) adopting analytic, critical, systematic and adversarial approaches; 3) using rigorous and rational methods of science...” (2004: 482).

Those African philosophers who came to be known, as I have highlighted above, as the universalists relied on this analysis to show that ethnophilosophy does not meet some key conditions of making philosophy what it is. My view in this regard, would be to make a simple illustration that most of those who contend that philosophy is universal in its scope, are mostly influenced by this analysis. African philosophers have kept on asking the question of what are the necessary and sufficient characteristics for a discipline to be called philosophy qua philosophy. In simple terms, these African philosophers are of the view that there are certain properties that are vital for an intellectual activity to attain the status of philosophy.

Hountondji, for example, conceived philosophy as special kind of body of literature whose purpose was to investigate the nature of things. According to Hountondji, philosophy “should compel a philosopher to reject as null and void the pseudo-philosophy of world-view and make him see clearly, that philosophy in the strictest sense, far from the continuation of spontaneous thought systems, is constituted by making a clean break from them...” (1983: 48). Therefore, for Hountondji, a true philosophy is one that is rooted in traditional thought systems. Hence, he advocates for a break from spontaneous thought systems as they do not have the capacity to constitute philosophy in a strict sense. The traditional thought system is not only unattractive but it also fails the test of universality that qualifies philosophy to be scientific in nature.

Hountondji says:

My view is that this universality must be preserved—not because philosophy must necessarily develop the same themes or even ask the same questions from one country or continent to another, but because these differences of content are meaningful precisely and only as differences of content, which, as such, refer back to the essential unity of single style of inquiry (1983: 56).

Hountondji, in the above quotation, contends that there is a resemblance between philosophy and science as a discipline. Appiah, in his *Philosophy and Necessary Questions*, attempted to demonstrate the link between philosophy and science. Here, Appiah contends that “the

distinction between philosophy and science is sometimes held to be comparison, a simple matter” (1995: 19). The idea is that the mere fact that science is theoretical in nature and this entails that philosophy should follow suite. But the link between philosophy and science seems too simplistic. Surely, there has to be some difference between the two theoretical disciplines. I am of the view that this similarity is not good enough to secure the claim that philosophy like science, needs to be more theoretical and abstract in nature. Although, both disciplines aim to interpret the world and to determine what the world can be; how the world is; and how the world function. Both science and philosophy do not rely on evidence of sensation and perception to arrive at the conclusion of their study. It is widely known that science relies on experimental evidence to arrive at epistemic state. On the other hand, philosophy relies on conceptual evidence to arrive at epistemic state²².

According to Appiah, the previous distinction between science and philosophy does not help either, “...to say that the use of empirical evidence in science involves experiments, while in philosophy it does not. Thought experiments play an important role in both science and philosophy, and many branches of the sciences, cosmology for example, have to proceed with very few, if any, experiments, just because experiments would be so hard to arrange” (*ibid*). Appiah notes that there is a difference that actually exists between philosophy and science but “it has to do with the fact that the empirical evidence that is essential for sciences has to be collected through a good deal of work, and more systematically, that evidence is sometimes relevant in philosophy” (1995: 19). The difference that Appiah is referring to, here, comes in as a ‘matter of degree’. This section sheds some light on the actual differences that exist between philosophy and science. He further sheds some light on the difference that exists between philosophy and science by an example from the philosophy of language, which involves “systematic evidence about how our languages are actually used if our theories of meaning are to be useful; and, the discovery of cases like the ones that Gettier thought up, can play a crucial role in epistemology”. As an emphasis to his point, Appiah argues that “...problems that are central to one time to philosophy the basis of new, or more specialized”

²² To emphasize, this point, Gyekye (1992: 239) argues that philosophy is a conceptual response to the problems that arise in human conditions. It is integral to point out that this definition of philosophy is more important, as it provides a vivid overview and captures clearly what the concept of philosophy is and the activity of philosophy.

(*ibid*). He further argues that:

This pattern is reflected in the fact that, where philosophy and the specialized sciences address the same problem, the more empirical questions are usually studied by the scientists and the less empirical ones by the philosophers. That is the sense in which philosophy really is a primarily conceptual matter (Appiah, 1995: 20).

It seems that the distinctions between philosophy and science are not that wide. It is evident in Appiah's submission of the distinction that he cannot see past the similarities that exist between the two disciplines in question. On the other hand, it looks like both these disciplines work together. This is the reason Appiah reiterates that "while philosophical work has often generated new sciences, new philosophical problems are generated by the development of science. Some of the most interesting philosophical work of our day, for example, involves examining the conceptual problems raised by relativity and quantum theory. To do this work, or, at least, to do it well, it is necessary to understand theoretical physics" (1995: 20).

Wiredu agrees with both Appiah and Hountondji that formal philosophy is characterized by universal rationality. According to him, it has to manifest certain characteristics like critical analysis, rigorous and abstract reasoning and argumentation, to avoid being dogmatic and pseudoscientific. Wiredu encourages that for African philosophy to develop, it must retain some sense of universality, it must be rigorous and have a theoretical underpinning of science.

Hence, he argues that:

The sort of awareness of science which is required, indeed indispensable here, is broadly methodological. The habits of exactness and rigour in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach so characteristic of science are attributes of mind which we in Africa urgently need to cultivate not just because they are in themselves virtues but also because they are necessary conditions of rapid modernization (Wiredu, 1980: 32).

The basis of Universalist thesis comes from the conception that philosophy is rigorous, universal and a rational discipline. The Universalists argue that philosophy can only be found in formal thought and not folk philosophy. Hountondji, as presented above, is reputed to be the champion of this view. As Hountondji explains, "The severe rigor of some of their deductions; the accuracy of some of their analyses; the skill which some of them displayed in debate, leave us in not doubt as to their status. They are certainly philosophers" (1983: 38-39). In a similar

vein, Oruka argues that “reason is a universal human trait. And the greatest disservice to African philosophy is to deny it reason and address it in magic and extra-rational traditionalism” (1987: 66). Bodunrin emphasizes this point, arguing that philosophy should be universal and it “must have the same meaning in all cultures although, the subjects that receive priority, and perhaps the method of dealing with them, may be dictated by cultural biases and the existential situation in the society within which the philosophers operate” (1984: 2). According to Bodunrin (1981: 2), African philosophers should be more critical of the traditional belief system while doing philosophy in order to meet the philosophical standards that are set by the Universalists. The need for being critical is vital in doing philosophy.

The issue at hand that the Universalist does not anticipate is that philosophy, as a discipline, and the body of knowledge are not fixed, but rather an ongoing reflective process or dialogue between philosophers, who in most cases, hold different positions, some even irreconcilable. Matolino (2015: 434) for example, spelled out [an] “...irreconcilable difference between the analytical and African philosophy”. This is a typical example of a philosophical discussion that is an ongoing process. Since the inception of African philosophy, the question of the method of doing African philosophy was part of the agenda. To date, the question of method in African philosophy has continued to be a vexatious problem. Hence, African philosophers like Innocent Asouzu (2007) and Ada Agada (2013) have continued to engage the corpus of traditional thoughts through critical conversations. Their method of doing so is known as conversationalism. By definition, conversationalism as a method, with emphasis put on originality, innovativeness, peer-criticism, creativity and individuality of ideas. The conversationalist seems to put emphasis on analysis more than critical rigour of ideas and concepts that can lead to a serious philosophical conversation of reshuffling a thesis and anti-thesis of a particular concept or ideas.

The picture portrayed in the previous paragraph, depicts philosophy as non-static and which can be subjected to change overtime. These changes can occur both in content and character, depending on the conditions that led to the philosophical position. But in ancient times, Greek philosophy was defined in terms of the love of wisdom and other instances as hinted above, namely scientific, analytical and self-reflective (Hountondji, 1983: 7). In that epoch, philosophy was practiced in different areas like market places. For example, Socrates was

martyred for interrogating people in public. Yet, this just depicts the complexity of defining the term philosophy and its nature. It is highly possible that we might have some appreciation of the nature of philosophy, and its sole aim as a discipline, but when it comes to its definition and scope, it is mostly difficult to capture.

The similarities between philosophy and science were well captured by Colin McGinn (2015) in his *Science of Philosophy*. According to McGinn, there are two dominant views concerning the similarity between philosophy and science. Firstly, Philosophy is viewed as continuous with science (McGinn, 2015: 84). This means that philosophy is like a “proto science or a commentary on the sciences or synthesis of them” (*ibid*).

According to this view, philosophy is an empirical discipline, though more removed from data than typical science, it is not different in kind from physics, chemistry, and biology. Thus, the subject of philosophy comes under the general heading of science because of its methodological similarity to the received sciences (McGinn, 2015: 84).

The first visible similarity amongst the two disciplines, according to McGinn’s observations, is methodological, although he does not specify what he means by methodological similarity amongst these two disciplines. I believe McGinn’s idea of methodological similarity between philosophy and science seems to be obvious. But things are mostly not as obvious as we might think. McGinn attempts to marry philosophy and science by appealing to the history or origin of philosophy. For McGinn, “historically, philosophy once contained the sciences, but eventually broke off from it, and it is still a kind of science-in-waiting—pupal science, as it were” (McGinn, 2015: 84). I am of view that McGinn could push his submission further to prove how, in terms of its “pupal” stage, philosophy was scientific in nature. I have some reservations to this claim. I will delve into this concern later. African philosophers, as shown above, have been too quick to make claims that philosophy and science are similar in nature, but this submission raises more questions than solutions to the predicament of the nature of African philosophy, or the trajectory or the character that African philosophy should take in the twenty-first century.

The picture that African philosophers have portrayed about the character of African philosophy

endorses the fact that, both disciplines of philosophy and science work hand in hand. Meanwhile science can investigate certain knowledge and provides answers, and in an event, where some residual questions remain unanswered, philosophy mostly is the first “candidate” to react and address those questions. In recent years, for example, philosophers have delved into the discussion of the quantum mechanics. Lawrence Krauss argued that “most philosophical questions centre on, for instance, quantum mechanics, such as “what is a measurement?” (2012: 243). In the question of ‘measurement’, Krauss observed that the reflections of physicists are more helpful than those of philosophers (2012: 120). In other instances, like that of agnosticism “philosophy has been useful for science...” (Krauss, 2012: 243). Another way that philosophy can be useful to science is by being an analyzing tool.

One of the tasks of philosophy is to scrutinize the concepts and presuppositions of scientific theories, to analyze and lay bare what is hidden and implicit in a particular scientific paradigm. It is a philosophical task - which is often carried out by physicists - to clarify the concepts of space, time, matter, energy, information, causality, etc, in relation to a given theory (De Haro, 2013).

It is worthwhile noting that African philosophers view the relationship between philosophy and science in a somewhat broader sense. There are problems that arise when this position is taken. Presumably, the relationship between the discipline of philosophy and science is not as broad as African philosophers seem to be pronouncing. Wiredu argued that “it is not, of course, incumbent on the African philosopher, or indeed any philosopher, to become a scientist. The sort of awareness of science which is required, indeed indispensable here, is broadly methodological” (Wiredu, 1980: 32). Appiah (1995) similarly argued that the distinction between philosophy and science seems to be a ‘simple matter’. Both the disciplines of philosophy and science are theoretical in nature. On this issue, Hountondji argues that “.... theoretical practice that is called philosophy, is inseparable from that other form of theoretical practice called science” (1983: 98). He further argues that “if philosophy can also be of use, it is only by helping to liberate a genuine theoretical tradition on this continent, an open scientific tradition, master of its problems and of its theme - That philosophy - that theoretical quest strictly hinged upon science” (Hountondji, 1983: 98-99). It seems clear that African philosophers, especially the ones mentioned above, conceive of the relationship between

philosophy and science in a broader sense.

It might be true that philosophy and science share certain features in common. But it does not follow that “philosophy is scientific in the broader sense” (Bennett, 1993: 442). The danger of taking a broader stance on the relationship between philosophy and science lies in the reverse statement. “One might just as well conclude that science is philosophic in the broader sense” (*ibid*). It is quite a worrisome issue that we can claim that philosophy is scientific in a broader sense, but we cannot say that science is philosophic in broader sense. James O. Bennett emphasizes this point in a subtle and euphemistic manner, through an analogy. In the analogy, Bennett (*ibid*) argues that “if two countries share a common border, we are not tempted to say that either one is the other in a broader sense. We simply recognize that distinct entities may share something in common”. He concludes by asserting that “there is no apparent reason why this should not be the case with philosophy and science” (Bennett, 1993: 442).

But African philosophers are not the only ones who conceive that the relationship between philosophy and science exists in a broader sense. Karl Jaspers’, a German philosopher, conceived the relationship in a broader sense when he argued that, “philosophy must be science like natural science, and strive to reach the same ideal of mathematical precision and authenticity” (1973: 8). It is clear that there is a serious problem with conceiving the relationship between philosophy and science in a broader sense. Karl Jaspers, in a critical analysis of this relationship, has doubted the “scientific character of philosophy, which constitutes nothing less than a challenge to the legitimacy of...philosophy” (as cited in Bennett, 1993: 438). For what it is worth, philosophy is a discipline that helps humanity to understand its social issues and in other instances, unpack certain scientific problems that lie with theories. In regard to the latter, philosophy possesses the ability to clarify some of the contradictions in scientific theories and in other instances can form a first stage of scientific theoretical revolution, i.e. Thomas Kuhn’s analysis of the “Structure of Scientific: Revolutions”.

Philosophy, in this sense, can be viewed as an enterprise that concerns itself with universal problems. The universal character of philosophy is a theoretical discipline that possesses characters and traits like sciences such as chemistry, mathematics and physics. In the light of this evidence, it would be absurd to consider philosophy as a less rigorous and critical method

on the ideas or concept that are only Oral and traditional. On this basis, philosophy seems to have “[an]...infallible criterion by which to judge the absurdity or relevance of any proposition of philosophy, however, general” (Hountondji, 1983: 47). Marcien Towa, similarly, argues that “philosophy is the courage to think the absolute” (2012: 13). This shows that both Hountondji and Towa believe that philosophy, in terms of its method, rules and character seeks to achieve absoluteness. I am apt to suspect that this is the very basis that has fostered the thesis of the universality of philosophy. Therefore, it can be demonstrated that the knowledge that a philosophical activity seeks to investigate is an absolute knowledge or universal, regardless of particularity of culture and human experiences. This view is quite interesting as it advocates for an African philosophy that is not different from Western philosophy. In other words, the alterity of African philosophy as a philosophical tradition that the Particularists seem to advocate for, is nullified by the position presented above.

4.2. Inadequacy of Envisaging African Philosophy as purely Particular

This section seeks to articulate the problem of envisaging philosophy as purely particular. It will strictly point out some of the problems that can arise when imaging philosophy in African context as purely particular. In its earlier stages of existence, African philosophy’s major issues or questions that arose included: how best we can evolve an (African) philosophy that is true to its name, and that will be capable of liberating Africa, and exonerate Africans from the myth that a number of ethnographers have held about Africans. The nature of African philosophy has been built as a polemic: the Universalists against the Particularists and vice versa. In other words, the nature of African philosophy has been built upon numerous accusations and counter-accusations.

As Mungwini says:

Early writings in African philosophy are replete with debates about the definition of African philosophy, the nature of African philosophy, its possibility and the methods and approaches that are best suited to yielding authentic African philosophy. It is within this context that scathing attacks were lodged against ethnophilosophy and scholars complicit in that grand project for championing colonial discourses on Africa. The lead figure in those attacks was Pauline Hountondji (2014: 24).

In the discussions of the relationship between universalism and particularism, the leading critic of the Universalist thesis is Van Hook. Van Hook suggests that African philosophers can do well without the input of Western thinking that argues that philosophy ought to be scientific or is scientific in nature. He contends that African philosophy is pluralistic and diverse in recent times. Outlaw, for example, believes that African philosophy is a postcolonial product. Given this status, and for it to be essentially deconstructive, it will require some decolonization of the Western logocentrism so that it will create a space for other thought in the mainstream philosophy, so as to re-center the marginalized thoughts, i.e. African, Chinese, etc. As Outlaw points it, “To deconstruct these concepts [vis-à-vis those of Western metaphysics and epistemology] is to displace them into the fabric of historicity out of which they have been shaped and in which we, too, have our being; it is to become involved in ‘the unmaking of a construct.’ Thus, in drawing on the practices from within Western philosophy, the attempt here is to borrow from a heritage of the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself” (Outlaw, 1987: 13). The heritage that Outlaws seems to be talking about, here, is more than just racists’ remarks that were instigated in the enlightenment era. The racist’s views that were perpetuated by enlightenment philosophers like Kant, Hume and Hegel.²³

Van Hook commented that “much of twentieth century African philosophy had understandably, properly, and necessarily been deconstructive. African philosophy had not merely been marginalized, it was of the page entirely” (2002: 92). He, further, claims that “by deconstruction, it means the de-centering of what is the central text (in this case a Western philosophy which denied reason to Africans) in order to re-center, to bring into the text the ‘other’ which has been ignored” (*ibid*). The deconstructive phase of African philosophy can be said to be particularism in nature, and to be truthful, particularism is quite essential. What makes particularism more essential in African philosophy, is that, it has marshalled a challenge

²³ In his, Tempels’ Philosophical Racialism, Matolino argues that “the first view of philosophical racialism seeks to claim that black people are, by virtue of their blackness, incapable of developing any culture, particularly one that is not to exhibit any form of logical and precise reasoning. And it may be argued, consistent with this line, black people’s behaviour is based on myths, ill-informed fears that give rise to abhorrent ritualism, superstition, and failure to distinguish fact from fiction, that results in a culture of indolence when it comes to the use of their mental faculties” (2015: 333). This, for example, depicts the views that have been perpetuated by a number of philosophers in the enlightenment era.

to the alleged universalism of Western philosophy.

However, there are ways in which the question of African philosophy challenges the very idea of Philosophy as it has been construed by the more dominant voices narrating the history and setting the agenda of philosophy in the West and does so in a most radical fashion whereby...the emergence of African philosophy poses deconstructive (and re-constructive) challenges (Outlaw, 1987: 11).

Universalism of the Western philosophy, as More reiterates is "...particularized universalism" (1996: 114). In More's analysis of the universalism in Western philosophy, he has come to a conclusion that this set of universalism is pretentious (1996: 115). In his analysis, More looked at the influential philosophers of the enlightenment like; Descartes, Locke, Hume, Hegel and Kant. More focused on Kant's work as "[he] laid the philosophical foundations for pure formalistic rationalism" (1996: 111). Kant and Habermas noted the instilled reason in the supreme seat of judgement before which anything that made a claim to validity has to be justified" (Habermas, 1987: 18). It is without doubt, that Descartes gave rationality its modern respect. "Affirming Aristotle's conception of human nature, Descartes asserted that since humans are thinking beings, the distinctive and paramount feature of humanness is thought²⁴" (More, 1996: 111). In a simple sense, rationality is a basic constitutive feature of human nature. Kant, interestingly, has excluded Africans in his category of human beings *qua* rational human beings (More, 1996: 114).

In this mood, Kant differentiates males from females by ascribing the following attributes to men: noble, deep, sublime, deep meditation, sustained reflection, laborious learning, profundity, abstract speculation, fundamental understanding, reason, universal rules, capable of acting in terms of principles, etc.

The intentional left out of the Africans infers "stupid, lacking in reason, lazy, thick skinned and so forth" (More, 1996: 114). But Hegel's racism is more subtle about Africans. Hegel

²⁴ The metaphysical picture that Moore portrays in this quotation is interesting, as this position I will delve into in the last chapter in detail. I am of the view that true universalism has to acknowledge that human beings are rational entities or capable of rationality.

contends that “African proper is wild and untamed, beyond the pale of the humanity proper, cannibalistic, undialectic, ungodly or without religion, development of culture” (1952: 196-199). So, in a simple sense, for Hegel, Africans are not human beings or even human enough to retain those characteristics. These characteristics are quite fundamental to the constitution of being a human qua rationality. This is how ‘philosophy’ in a strict sense was denied for Africans. Presumably, that is the reason philosophy equated with African was questioned.

Thus far, I have narrated the picture of the problem of imagining philosophy as either purely universal or particular. It would be worthwhile to turn our attention to the process of deconstruction as Van Hook proposes as solution to these problems. Deconstructive is defined, according to Outlaw, as efforts that are “associated with a particular complex of practices with the enterprise of Western philosophy” (1987: 11). “One of the objectives of deconstruction is to critique and displace the absolutist metaphysics and epistemology which are thought to identify and provide knowledge of a rational order of axioms, first principles, and postulates that are the foundations of all that is, and of knowing what is” (*ibid*). The picture that the quotation paints is that there is a set of metaphysical stands that construe the narrative of philosophy through one historical account that claims to be the “foundations of that is, and knowing what is” (*ibid*). The voices that are quite dominating in philosophy are the Western voices which claim that the only correct narrative of philosophy is through the eyes of Western culture. This therefore causes Western philosophy to claim absolute knowledge, as they believe that they know what all is. The task of the practice of deconstruction is to show that “all philosophical systematizing is a matter of strategy which pretends to be based on a complete system of self-evident or transcendental axioms” (*ibid*). Unfortunately, this is the tendency that is displaced by universalism as defended by most Western philosophers, like, for example, Kant. Deconstructive, in a simple sense, is to de-center the already existing concepts. On this, Outlaw notes that “to deconstruct these concepts is to displace them into a fabric of historicity out of which they have been shaped and in which we, too, have our being. Thus, in drawing on practices from within Western philosophy...” (*ibid*). Van Hook observes that deconstruction is not a complete process. In fact, deconstruction is an on-going process that will continue for some time. Presumably, it will continue until African philosophy is well recognized. “But I think it is also fair to say that, if the dominant motif in the old millennium

was the deconstructive task for African philosophy, then it may also be the case that in the new millennium, African philosophy will move more forcefully into a reconstructive phase” (Van Hook, 2002: 92).

The fundamental issue is the idea of a single philosophical inquiry. There is a problem with the idea of philosophy that is the same everywhere in character and the methodology of doing philosophy. Hence, Mangena argues that “the methodology of doing philosophy depends entirely on the context in which the philosophy is situated” (2014: 99), I believe this is the same with “Philosophy”. Mangena seems to insist that philosophy is an integral part of a culture. I believe he is also prepared to argue that philosophy is inseparable from culture. Hence, the Particularists as Mangena argues simplistically, believe that if philosophy were to be called African philosophy in its true sense; it would need to be rooted in African traditions and cultures. This then entails that philosophy is a cultural product. According to their conceptions, there is no way we can talk about philosophy as a discipline that is distinctly Western in nature. One of the issues that this position faces, is the issue of cultural encounters. Hence, and in response to this, Mangena argues that “...cultural encounters cannot be avoided and may have played a part in the thinking of most Universalists,...[hence, He] argues that indigeneity remains an integral part of a people’s philosophy” (2014: 102).

Particularists, like; C.B Nze, John Mbiti and others believe that African philosophy needs to anchor its own logic and analysis, rather than relying on Western methods and tools of analysis. In fact, Nze contends that there is a need to develop African logical foundations that can bring solutions to local problems (2013: 18). “Logic lies at the foundation of everything, once it is established, every other form of theorizing takes shape. He maintains that Aristotle was the man to do it in the Western tradition, creating the foundation upon which theorists of different inclinations will build their thoughts” (Mangena, 2013: 104).

Hence, Nze asserts that:

The practice which has grown uncontrolled since the colonial times in which African intellectuals seek to construct native African theories upon the logical foundation of the West is simply misguided. Western intellectuals read such work and toss it aside because they see nothing different in what they have since accomplished (2013: 18).

The reason for tossing away the African intellectuals' works, despite the fundamental ignorance and prejudices that most of the Western intellectuals possess about African intellectual works, is because they are not bringing anything new to the table. This position aligns with that of Nze. From this view, it seems to suggest that we cannot use Western logic to create African philosophy. The better way to create African philosophy, according to Mangena's (2014: 106) view, is to "take ethno-philosophy further from where it was left by its founders instead of trying to run away from our shadow by developing its logic."

Similarly, Agada agrees that:

It is true that ethnophilosophy (which encompasses communal and traditional African thought and the scholarly endeavor of their systematization in the light of Western philosophy) marked one tremendous leap for African philosophy, but it is only a stage, a foundational level of African philosophy (2013: 240).

According to Agada, the serious question that "we are confronted with, is the naked fact that African philosophy has remained synonymous with ethno-philosophy long after its inception" (2013: 241). This question, as much as it is metaphilosophically interesting, has the tendency of taking us back to the philosophical discussions that were held in the 80s by Hountondji (1983), Oruka (1984) Wiredu (1980). I have selected these authors randomly, but during these times there was a high rate of criticism of ethnophilosophy as an approach to African philosophy. In fact, the nature of African philosophy that is imagined through the eyes of this approach has the potential of been less recognized as a philosophical tradition. The reason for this is quite simply to provide, because ethnophilosophy has been criticized as being a less critical of the beliefs that it calls philosophy (Hountondji, 1983). What the ethno-philosophers do, in fact, is to pass on beliefs from the folk-tales and proverbs without even rigorously analyzing them.

There are several problems with imagining (African) philosophy as purely universal or particular. However, so far, I have portrayed some of the weaknesses of imagining (African) philosophy as universal or particular. In a nutshell, the debate between universalism and particularism in African philosophy can be seen, in a simple sense, as conflict between cultures, i.e, between The Western scientific and African traditional. The two cultures provide us with a clue on the issue of how philosophy of its culture is construed. This has a clear implication

over how philosophy is imagined in both the cultures. According to the Universalists, Philosophy needs to be scientific so as to meet the standard of been philosophical. Nevertheless, the Particularists argue that philosophy is culture-oriented. There are some serious issues with the view of seeing philosophy as an extreme end of the spectrum.

Imagining (African) philosophy as purely universal leads to a number of criticisms. The issue with this conception is that of the so-called principles or theories applicable across-cultures as being frustrating to other thoughts, and having the potential of negatively influencing those thoughts, in the course of their applicability. The Universalists seem to argue for a similar kind of position. Hence, Inusah argues that “[the]...problem with the universalists’ quest for a transcultural philosophy is that, they conflate a social phenomenon with a universal scientific theory” (2010: 20). Similarly, Gyekye argues that “scientific truths qua scientific truths transcend cultural and social frontiers: hence we do not speak of American physics, French biology, Russian mathematics, African chemistry, and so on. But these observations are irrelevant when it comes to social theory” (2007: 145). It looks like Gyekye’s conception of philosophy in this instance is different from what Hountondji and others have been arguing for - their conception of philosophy is that it possesses traits similar to science. Given these stands, therefore, philosophy is transculturally valid. The idea that philosophy is transculturally valid means that it will have the same results while applied in any culture. Hence, on this point, Hountondji argues that philosophy should retain the same characteristics and traits when it qualifies as African.

The question that Hountondji poses is interesting as it shows that what he has in mind, is that philosophy is transcultural and scientific. Therefore, Hountondji’s sense of philosophy should be transcultural and scientific. The problem is that philosophy is not entirely scientific. The mere fact that philosophy is not entirely scientific presents a problem for the philosophy that the Universalists seek to impose on African philosophy. The Universalists’ conception of philosophy leaves less to be desired as the philosophy they are arguing for only elevates one particular culture over other cultures. And when it comes to the idea of applicability of a particular philosophy that they have in mind, and that is applicable across all cultures, it fails other cultures. In this regard, Appiah commented that Africa philosophy is instructive: “this particular constellation of problems and projects is not often found outside Africa: a recent

colonial history; a multiplicity of diverse sub-national indigenous traditions; a foreign language whose metropolitan culture has traditionally defined the natives by their race as inferior; a literary culture still very much in the making” (1992: 76-77). The talk of universal problem like what the universal claims about philosophy might be faulty. The question that comes to mind, is whether we can acknowledge that philosophy is not entirely scientific but a social theory, as Gyekye seems to suggest (1997: 145). It would not be difficult for us to actually observe some faults in talk of universally shared problems amongst human beings as the Universalists contend. This researcher notes that the Universalists are quick to argue that philosophy is in the business of addressing problems that are universally shared by human beings.

These are some of the problems that the Universalists seem to encounter while arguing for their position on philosophy. It is impossible that there is a philosophy that is completely universal and culturally transcendent in the real sense of the word. I am quite certain of this and cautious of the usage of words in the previous sentence. I am of the view that there is no way that a philosophy, whether in character or method, can be applicable to all cultures. Therefore, in some subtle sense, I believe that Hountondji’s conception that philosophy has a single mode of inquiry is a wrong perception of things. The reason for this commitment is that, if we accept the position that philosophy has a single mode of inquiry, it then leads us to accidentally accept that philosophy has a single method of inquiry too. This is not a position that we need to find ourselves in. Hence, African philosophers like, Ozumba and Onwuanibe have contended that there are different cultures, and this entails that those cultures have different ways of explaining reality. To imagine philosophy as purely universal has some serious problems in (African) philosophy. This is because there are some serious fundamental problems with imagining (African) philosophy as purely universal. Similarly, there is a problem of imagining philosophy as purely particular. One of the issues that comes to mind while talking of philosophy as a cultural orientation is the issue of relativism. Another issue that the Universalists have claimed is that a traditional philosophy might not be critical enough to qualify as philosophy. In sum, these are some of the issues that both the Universalists and Particularists encounter while attempting to imagine African philosophy as purely universal or particular. It is clear from the above presentation that there are some inadequacies of imagining

African philosophy as purely universal or particular. There is no way that we can be able to account for a robust African philosophy by using universal or particular alone. In terms of the ingredients, using either universal or particular alone without the other, will lead to the omission of the other facets of African philosophy that are important to qualify as robust African philosophy.

4.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to show that there are some problems or inadequacies with imagining (African) philosophy as either purely universal or particular. I also argued that in African philosophy, more especially amongst African philosophers themselves, there is a problem with imagining philosophy as they have been doing it. This can be seen in the explanations that they provide to account for the nature and concept of African philosophy. Looking predominantly at the concept and the nature of (African) philosophy, it can be seen that the idea of imagining it as purely universal or particular just creates more problems than solutions. In this chapter, I have argued that there is no single philosophical inquiry that is applicable to all cultures as Bodunrin, Hountondji, Appiah and some others have suggested. This, therefore, denies a further claim that there is a transcultural philosophy. The idea and thought of transcultural philosophy are incompatible with our intuition that philosophy is a social product that is a product of cultures. Although the Universalist might argue that philosophy is scientific in nature, it goes beyond the cultural boundaries. But the problem that we cannot shy away from is the fact that this position leaves a lot to be desired. This tends to elevate an achievement of a particular culture over others. To some extent, philosophy is a product of a culture of the people and this is a fact that we cannot easily dismiss. Hence, as Inusah argues, “there is no philosophy that is completely universal and culturally transcendent in the real sense of the word. Every philosopher philosophizes within a specific or particular cultural orientation and this influences his ideas about reality” (2010: 20).

Chapter Five

Feasibility of an Eclectic Approach to African Philosophy

5. Introduction

In the absence of the characteristics that constitute an acceptable African philosophy, due to this status of affairs there would be no authoritative reference point to which can be used as responsible for the creation of a form of philosophy without being universalist and particularist. Can we forge a basis of philosophy that is neither befogged with being dogmatic nor romanticize the past? In doing so, we would be attempting to address the problem of the relationship between the universal and particular in philosophy as this relationship has informed the debate between the universalists and the particularists in African philosophy. I am apt to suspect, furthermore, that this investigative path will land us into true nature of African philosophy. In this chapter, I seek to set out non-universal as well as non-particular African philosophy that goes past these praxes and reflect on the prospective true nature of philosophy that is both sensitive to the experiences of the people without actually losing its status of being scientific.

My way of proceeding will be influenced by three factors; firstly, attempting to see the feasibility of an eclectic approach to the nature of (African) philosophy that acknowledges that universals is dependent on the particular. Secondly, the nature of concept of universals. In my analysis of the ontological status of ‘universals’, I differ with Plato who conceives ‘universals’ as independent things that are permeant and perfect. I argue that they are actually heavily reliance on the particular for their existence. This is so because I take it that universal can and can only exist after we have instantiated their particulars. And thirdly, the nature of humanity and its interrelations, and their thought that seem to have both the posture of being universal and particular.

5.1. On Feasibility of Eclectic Approach

The establishment of a more legitimate nature of African philosophy is an intricate problem

that still needs to be accounted for instead of the perpetual vehement impasse between the universalists and particularists. I suggest that a more legitimate nature of African philosophy should be conceived as work that still needs some working or 'still in progress' (Chimakonam, 2015). As such, what is at state is the whole question about the nature of African philosophy that will exhibit characteristics that can serve as tools to qualify it to the standard of being a philosophical tradition. To my mind, the question about what kind of nature African philosophy should denote to qualify as a philosophical tradition rests on the assumption that:

...a universal essence of philosophy seems to me unjustified even if one were to limit oneself to Western philosophy. What, for example, is the common essence shared by Descartes and Nietzsche, or by Thales and Carnap? It is also extremely difficult to make concrete the idea of a universal philosophical method or universal standards of philosophising. What remains of the universalist claim seems to amount to little more than that the practice of philosophy involves 'thinking'. And as such thinking, I would argue, does not necessarily commit us to what Outlaw calls 'logocentrism', but may also include narrative as well as argumentative thought (Van Hook, 1997: 394).

In view of this, it can be argued that the nature of philosophy historically has been very diverse. The truth of the matter is that history of philosophy is not only necessarily diverse but the viability and legitimacy of one approach over others approaches. Even if philosophy should have the same character in different cultures in terms of criticism and being argumentative as an essential characteristic of anything to qualify as philosophy, there are instances where there are sharp differences in terms of content and method of philosophizing. Even though they might have some clear differences in terms of method and content there has never been a day were either of these endeavors have been accused on been unphilosophical. For any endeavors to be granted the status of philosophy, it should divorce itself from any descriptive accounts of African thought systems (Bodunrin, 1991: 65). Van Hook claims that "narrative and argumentative thought both enjoy philosophical standing must be seen as instructive as both methods are, with equal effectiveness, able to capture what human reflection on life is or has been" (1997: 394). The concern on the nature of African philosophy, as envisage by the universalists and particularists, is twofold; firstly, is concern with the implicit question of the character that any endeavors should denote to be attributed the status of philosophy in a universal sense, or that exhibit an acceptable universal character of philosophy. Secondly,

following logically from the first concern, is what form should the nature of African philosophy take in order for it to be meaningful and legitimate philosophy that reflects and denotes the true nature of our humanity?

As to properly set the philosophical questions arising from the first concern, I will attempt a theoretical justification of the nature of African philosophy. Kwandiwe Kondlo and Chinyengozi Ejiogu (2011: xxii) argue that Africa has been a victim of colonialism and “...many African states continue to live with the indelible marks of colonialism into the twenty-first century”. This victimization does not end only in the political spaces, but it follows through to the thought systems of Africa too. This is reflected on the attitude of colonialism of been imperial and dominated in terms of thought. It is in light of this that colonial systems were also a vehicle used to perpetuate the idea that European thought is superior and more prevalent than African thought. To my mind, and in view of this argument, the nature of African philosophy which prevailed in Europe, cannot be help to Africa without due regard of the context within which it exists or acknowledge the contextual data provided by their immediate surrounding like that of African traditional culture. And so, what is Africa’s contribution to the nature of (African) philosophy that is sensitive to context and still acknowledge that we are members of humanity in general. I, therefore, choose in the course of my analysis, to intermittently respond to the above concerns.

It is desirable for any culture to be attributed a philosophical status, as the status of philosophy in any cannot be gainsaid. This show that philosophy is quite vital for any culture. Put differently, culture needs to have some sense of a philosophical exercise. In some sense, the underline assumption that is at work here is human beings are rational beings, and most rational thought process has capacity of being a philosophical thought. Arguably, it is agreed—amongst philosophers—that philosophy remains the most desirable form of knowledge that cultures aspire to be associated with. Hence, it worthwhile to attempt to account to the question of the particularity of individuals that are practitioners and the particularity and universality of philosophy itself. It is in this respect that Theophile Obenga argues that “All the major issues that have engaged the attention of philosophers in Asia, Europe, America, etc. can be found in African philosophy...Any doubt about the reason and rationality in Africa was chiefly due to anthropological innuendoes. Philosophy as such was not, and has never been, a mystery to the

African mind” (2004: 49). Hence, it is absurd to even attempt to argue that philosophy does not exist in Africa. What any philosopher in African context who seeks to endeavor in any intellectual activities of any theme, has to adhere to character of going beyond the descriptive account. This is because any attempts of an intellectual activity that denotes descriptive posture will not attain any status of philosophy. It would be worthwhile to adhere to the narrative and argumentative principle in order for it to be a philosophical work that is acceptable across the spectrum.

Nonetheless, it is important to consider that even though the nature of African philosophy might be facing several criticisms, like that of been taken as un-philosophical and failing to live to the standard sets for any philosophy to be considered a philosophy, the cultural thought and its ideals will prevail over those challenges of been denigrated. In my opinion what matters is to initiate an African way of embracing philosophy—by incorporating African traditional thoughts and values—that will ensure a philosophy, above all, that is legitimate and viable that reflects on the essences of our humanity. It is arguably, uncontroversial that the theory of a legitimate philosophy can be rested on our humanity. And this position, has the capacity of demonstrating and accounting for the conundrum of universals. This will occupy our attention later in the chapter. But what remains is the question is what form should the nature of African philosophy look like?

It is important to note that the true nature of African philosophy is one that will be able to acknowledge express that philosophies, any kind, are expressions of specific historical and cultural contexts, and of the problems, solutions and worldview to be found among them (Van Hook, 1997: 392). This is to say that African philosophy should be relevant to African experiences, ideas and values. Furthermore, this is also making a claim that even methodologically, African philosophy may be radically different to its Western counterpart, if it returns the universal principles like that of being argumentative and narrative. It is in this view that it can be argued that a true nature of African philosophy is valued as good-in-itself, not only because it provides a desirable end, but also because it holds the idea that philosophies are expressions of specific historical and cultural contexts. Failure to acknowledge the idea of philosophies’ character being ‘specific historical and cultural contextual’, one will be accepting that philosophy is a “single philosophical system...govern[ing]..the activity of philosophizing”

(Van Hook, 1997: 192). But there are doubts that there is a single universal philosophy. What we seem to have are particular philosophies that originate from different situations and experiences—each with its peculiar method and content.

In sum, for the true nature of (African) philosophy to be feasible, it ought to be a type of philosophy that always conceive ‘universality and unity’, because both has appeared to be absent in the discourse. In line this view, Outlaw argues that “philosophy is and always has been without universality and unity” (1987: 35). Hence, it is not worrisome to conclude that there is no single philosophy or a single style of having a philosophical inquiry. So, it is false to claim that “Western philosophy has served as court rationalist for false universalisms that... explicitly excluded people of African descent...among others...The dominant voices in philosophy have been infected with logocentrism” (Outlaw, 1987: 14).

5.2. On the Nature of Universals

I have pointed out above that the feasibility of the nature of African philosophy requires an acknowledgement of the idea that philosophies in character are historical specific and cultural contextual. Arguably, however, is that as things stands African philosophy still faces challenges of been critique of failing to meet the standards of been unphilosophical as it does not denote characteristics of being ‘objective and universal’. But these characteristics do not tell a full story of the true nature of (African) philosophy as it neglects or downplay the fact that the nature of African philosophy cannot be complete without any ‘African’ ingredients. It will be absurd for a philosophy with a prefix ‘African’ to possess characteristics that do not trace back to African traditional thought. Hence, my proposed eclectic theory towards the nature of African philosophy can be said to be radically different from the theoretical positions that the universalists and particularists perceived to be the nature of African philosophy. My proposed theory of the nature of African appreciates that philosophy’s character is historical specific and cultural context, but as contextual as it is also going beyond those perimeters. This is to say that we cannot shy away from the fact that there are certain philosophical characteristics that are universal or that we share amongst ourselves as human beings. I appeal to humanity here as much as philosophy is a scientific discipline its main practitioners are human beings, and it is bound in their identity for being both (i) a member of a specific groups,

and (ii) a member of the human group in general. Put differently, firstly, a human being in her identity are member of their contextual groups that is distinctive in terms of race, male and female. Secondly, human being in her identity can be also be a member of humanity in general. This goes beyond all immediate contingencies that she possesses. This is to say that a human being's identity is both universal and particular in character. It would be worthwhile as an attempt to postulates the true nature of African philosophy to start by analyzing the doctrine that has informed the debate. The doctrine of 'universals' has informed the debate or is at the center of the debate of the universality of philosophy.

It is important to note that universal is not devoid of some limitations as the universalists wishes to present in theirs defense of their universal philosophy. It is evident in my attempt and the theory I propose that I wish to go beyond discussions of characteristics of what constitutes African philosophy and worry about the very nature of the doctrines that informs the debate. I am aware that I would appeal to some characteristics of that constitutes African philosopher later. But for the time being, is essential to investigate the nature of 'universals' which is certainly unclear. The true nature of universals is truly uncertain. Why is it that I claim that the nature of 'universals' is uncertain? The reason for the uncertainty of 'universals' is that we cannot discuss it within the terrain of metaphysics. Janz (2009: 147) puts it like this:

If there is something universal, though, and we grant that there is communication, from where could these arise, if metaphysics is not the answer? Perhaps the key is to recognize that the universal is the result of dialogical reflection, not the presupposition of it. Universals do not make conversation possible, but they do form the goal of the conversation. How can this be done?

The above quotation is quite interesting as it reveals a lot about Janz's theoretical commitments to the universals. This passage raises more problems than solutions to philosophical universalism. Janz in his analysis of Wiredu's universal, seems to be worried about the nature of universals. Hence, he actually makes the claim that the nature of universal is uncertain. The uncertainty of universal's nature in the light of Janz's analysis lies in the domain of metaphysics. But in another avenue like in phenomenology, the nature of universal is said to have the potential to flourish. Janz makes an interesting remark in the latter part of the above quotation concerning universals. He is of view that 'universals' do not make conversation plausible between cultures. But universals in their actual nature do form the goal of the

conversation that occurs between cultures. On this, Janz is saying that Wiredu is wrong to conceive that the very idea of ‘universals’ does not originate in the metaphysics of humanity, as in other instances of the very categories of universals that we are talking about might not be as universal as we think. In other instances, those universals might be in their nature universal as we think. So that seems to be at the root of his claim that “universals do not make conversation possible but they do form the goal of conversation” (Janz, 2009: 147). A rational person cannot reject the argument offered as to account for why universals are just the goal of conversations amongst cultures not what makes conversation possible. But I seek to suggest that there is a problem in Janz’s submission in his rejection of the status of universals in the domain of metaphysics in favour of phenomenology. In his attempt to go past the inherited problems that come with the nature of universals in metaphysics, Janz seems to avoid the problem by portraying a simplistic picture that is not completely concerned with the nature of universals in its account. I describe it a simplistic account of the nature of universals as the story is more complicated than what Janz actually presented. It is true he is dismissing the debate of universal as one that does not belong to the metaphysical domain. Hence, he suggests that phenomenology is a way out of the predicament.

The ultimate point that Janz is aiming at is that the nature of universals in metaphysics is problematic. It is certainly correct that the nature of universal in the domain of metaphysics is problematic. But does it mean that there is no other way by which the problem that arises can be dealt with in the domain of metaphysics? I am of the view that Janz was too quick to arrive at his conclusion of rejecting the role of universals in the metaphysical domain. Specifically, the problem I have with Janz’s position is that, Janz does not even worry about the nature of universals for what it is. Janz seems quite comfortable to claim that there is a myth of purity in talks of universals. It would be worthwhile to acknowledge that my quarrel with Janz is on the claim that the talks of universals do not belong in the domain of metaphysics. Janz’s theoretical commitment of philosophy is really not in contention, but I have a problem with his claim that universals do not belong in the domain of metaphysics. I think that Janz has only provided us with a narrow analysis on issues around the nature of universals, but he made a bigger claim out of that analysis. Following his analysis, Janz (2009: 145) ended by making a claim that “...looking for a metaphysical grounding for cultural interaction will not work, nor will

looking for some mental attribute or content that is universally held”. On this point, he further contends that “the first turns out to be incoherent, and the second, even if one assents to the universality of certain capabilities of the mind, will not be enough to guarantee commonality without bringing in intentionality, at which point the question is shifted from human capabilities and their objects, to human experience” (Ibid). It will be disingenuous to refute that, as the picture stands, Janz is correct. But does the mere fact that the scenario, as painted above, shows that the nature of universals which is problematic in metaphysics does not lead to the abandonment of talks in this domain. It would be useful to address those problems that come with talks of universals whether in its nature.

I assume that in understanding the nature of universals we can be able to really appreciate the true nature of this doctrine. The doctrine of universals originated from the debate between Plato and Aristotle. Plato argues that ‘universals’ are permeant and perfect. But the controversy occurs when Plato contends that (universal) forms are part of all things that exists. This entails that by nature, universals, according to Plato, are these permeant and perfect things that forms part of all things that exists. The idea of one thing to be one and belong to many is problematic in itself. One thing cannot be many things at the same time. But what is Plato really attempting to say here? I suggest that Plato was battle with the right things but his conclusion that universals are one thing that belongs to many things at the same time was not accurate. I am inclined to think that it was not an accurate interpretation of the nature of the universals.

The problem with Plato’s theoretical position is the way he framed his metaphysics. Plato’s framed ‘universals’ as ultimate things that is permeant and perfect and all other things that are not (forms) universal are just mere particulars. It to reiterates, as I have argued in the first chapter, that there are three proposed classifications of forms, namely, realism, conceptual and relational forms²⁵. My mention of this classifications is to avoid being misunderstood when taking about the categories of ‘universals’. It should be noted that my perception is not homogenous in nature. So, the nature of ‘universals’ differs from how Plato and Aristotle view it. I am of view that the better way to understand the nature of the ‘universals’ is not to start

²⁵ See, page 36-42, for a detail account on how these theoretical positions attempt to account for the notion of universal.

with the ‘universals’ at the apex and in all things that exists but to start with “its” particular. My usage of the word ‘its’ here is to demonstrate a theoretical commitment in metaphysics. I view particular as the first aspect and universals comes afterwards. Here, I mean that universals in my metaphysical scheme does not exists on its own, simply independent of the particular, but it solely dependents on its particular. This can be demonstrated easier or even further in a way that shows that universalism concerns itself with themes that are common among all human beings or cultures, and; particularism focuses on themes that instantiate in some cultures, but not others. This is a very strong categorizing of things, there is more acceptable one that contends that universalism concerns itself with themes that are common among all human beings or cultures, while particularism focuses on themes that can be instantiate in cultures, entities and ideas. I take the previous theoretical metaphysical position serious as it demonstrates a true nature of the universals. In this metaphysical scheme, the ‘universals’ would not exist without a clear reliance on their particulars. Particulars provides a platform by which we can arrive at the universals. So, how do we arrive at the universals. We arrive at the universals when we have examined the properties that we consider common among different cultures, entities and ideas. This is when we establish the universals.

This, in a simple sense, is to say that the universals cannot exist without particular. But one thing to note is that particulars do not depend on universals to exist. So, in this line of thought, the relationship between the universals and particulars is linear in nature, from particular towards universals. But this does not entail that particular relies on universals for their existence. It is important to underscore that Aristotle’s position on the ontological status of universal takes Plato’s status on forms upside down. Aristotle’s ontological priority is on particular, while Plato’s priority is on universal forms. But there is a clear difference between the two philosophical positions on the relationship between the universals and particulars. Aristotle posits that there is no separation between the universal and particular. Putting it differently, Aristotle takes it that there is a dependent relationship between universal and particular. But this dependent ontological status relationship between universal and particular is linear in nature. Plato takes it that there is a separation between the universal and particular. The tip of the iceberg, on this matter, is that Plato believes that universals actually exist independent of particulars. This position, in my opinion, is problematic. This is because it tends

to lead to the problem of accidental existence as it would be beyond the scope of metaphysics.

In light of this, understanding universal as something that is independent of its particular will be creating a theoretical problem—that would be making a commitment that universals are accidental things in the scope of metaphysics. Alexander of Aphrodisias, on this matter, argues “that of which the universal (to katholou) is an accident is something, but the universal is not something in the proper sense, but something that is an accident of that thing” (as cited in Sirkel, 2011: 301). From this standpoint, Alexander is attempting to show that universal is something not in a concrete sense. But particulars are the only thing that enjoys the status of ontological status over universals. In essence, Alexander is making the claim that due to the fact that universal does not enjoy ontological status, it implies that it is just an accident that occurs. This is not a favourable position that we as philosophers who still want to talk about things in general and their commonalities would wish to end up in. Therefore, the burden to show the status of universal in the greater scheme of things would be on us to be able to continue the talks of universals.

In light with this argument, one can conclude that universals cannot exist without particular. But one thing to note is that particulars do not depend on universals to exist. So, in this line of thought, the relationship between the universals and particulars is linear in nature, from particular towards universals. But this does not entail that particular relies on universals for their existence. And the relationship between the universals and particulars are symbiotic in nature. How is this relationship symbiotic? It is symbolic in that neither one of them will be relevant without the other. For universals to exist it needs on particulars to exist. So, this is a simple relationship between the two metaphysical categories to spell. But, on the other hand, for particular to be well articulated as one it will need the ‘universal’ category, but this relationship should not be given too much attention as it is less significant. The first relationship that is expressed as linear in nature is important on the greater scheme of things.

5.3. Towards and Eclectic approach to African philosophy

I have already, in the previous sections, pointed out that our humanity grounds the kind of African philosophy that appreciate the reality that individual being is a member of a specific group and something that is beyond the individual inherent identity. Nevertheless, the question

of what form should a true nature of African philosophy be, is still a complex one to account for. Within this complexity, it is not possible to have a direct nature of African philosophy that in all matters concerns itself with the appreciation of the true nature of ‘universals’. Thus, the possibility of attaining the true nature of ‘universals’ remain the only avenue that we can secure a true nature of (African) philosophy, as argued above. Given this, I seek to contend that there is a need for us to consider the ontological relationship between the universal and particular as accounting for this relationship we can arrive at the true understanding of the doctrine that is central to the debate, and it can lead us to the true nature of (African) philosophy. My proposed theoretical approach to (African) philosophy is likely to promote deeper understanding of our humanity—that is what the particularists have shown to be at question—and contends that our humanity is constituted by both the universal and particular in our identity. This certainly informs our philosophies also. Hence, above, philosophies have been argued to be historical and culturally specific and universal at the same time.

I am aware that Andrew F. Uduigwomen has proposed a solution to the impasse between the universalists and the particularists in the nature of African philosophy. But this solution that also serves as alternative theory does not necessarily bring a workable solution. In other words, I am of view that Uduigwomen does not address the questions for what it is. As for him, the solution lies with mere intellectual romances between the certain features of the universalists and the particularists. The reason for this is because the universalists offers a necessary analytic and conceptual framework (Uduigwomen, 1995). Meanwhile, the particularists will provide the data that the Universalists will analyse. Hence, on this point, Uduigwomen argues that “since this framework cannot thrive in a vacuum, the particularist approach will supply the raw materials or data needed by the Universalists. Thus, it will deliver the universalist approach from mere logic-chopping and abstractness” (1995: 4). Uduigwomen on this account holds that:

The eclectic school holds that an intellectual romance between the universalist conception and the particularist conception will give rise to an authentic African philosophy. The universalist approach will provide the necessary analytic and conceptual framework for the particularist school. Since, according to Uduigwomen, this framework cannot thrive in a vacuum, the particularist approach will in turn supply the raw materials or indigenous data needed by the universalist approach. From the above submission of Uduigwomen, one easily detects that eclecticism for him entails employing Western methods and African paraphernalia (1995: 6).

Similarly, Chimakonam argues that:

Eclectics, in a simple sense, are those African philosophers who believe that the effective integration or some set of complementation of the African native system and the Western system could produce a viable synthesis that is both modern and African in nature (2015: 26).

Arguably, this does not tell the full story of where lies the problem. The problem is not the way Uduigwomen has presented it, but the better way to phrase the problem at hand is to look at the doctrine that has informed the debate. And understanding the doctrine would yield more profitable solutions to the debate than mere resorting to a game of chopping and pasting from different philosophical traditions. Put differently, I view the integration that is been proposed by both Uduigwomen and Chimakonam as not theoretically telling the truth about the problem. It is not accurate and enough to merely attempt to find a complementation between the universalists and particularists position on the nature of (African) philosophy. But there is a need to go beyond this simplistic exercise and worry about the real concern of the debate.

This observation is interesting as it denotes that Uduigwomen has not yet actually gone past the Universalists thesis that he opted to reject in the first place. In a simple sense, Uduigwomen, at the onset, had been concerned with the vehement dialectic position between the Universalists and the Particularists. I suspect that the first concern is that African philosophy cannot show some characteristics of the Western method without any traits of African traditional thought in the content, method, and character. Hence, his proposal that the solution to the problem that Afolayan presented and argued, has been “skewed in favour of the Universalists, who had contended that the condition for the possibility of an African conception of philosophy cannot be achieved outside the universal” (2009: 363).

If we take the eclecticism as proposed by Uduigwomen, it means we will be inheriting some theoretical erroneous commitments that come with it. But there is no need for us to insist on this type of eclecticism. I am of the view that, presumably, eclecticism can be a solution to the problems between the Universalists and the Particularists. But not in the way that Uduigwomen proposes. Perhaps, it could be worthwhile to even mention that the category of universal in African philosophy seems to be accepted without a thorough analysis to check its nature. I am of the view that the talks of philosophy as universal are empty talks. I am certain that this is

quite an unconventional position. As unconventional as this utterance might be, it is not treading on unusual terrain. I am certain the burden of the proof lies with the one who seeks to deny the already established position. I propose an eclectic position that is different from Uduigwomen, in this I deny the mere hybrid of the universalists and the particularists as a solution to the problem or even the alternative approach. I suggest that a better way is to conceive universal as grounded in particular.

So, in view of this, I can argue that an eclectic approach to African philosophy that should be taken seriously is one that acknowledges that the universal as argued so far in literature is problematic. And there is no need for a hybrid between the Universalist and the Particularist approach to African philosophy. My reason is that if we take eclecticism to mean the hybrid position of the two philosophical positions on the nature of African philosophy, it would be a wrong position regarding the true nature of universals. What these positions have succeeded in achieving, is to cancel each other out rather than actually bringing about a promise of a foundation that can be used to conjure up a philosophical tradition. Hence, in the light of this, I agree with Janz (2009) and Chimakonam (2018) that there is no need to continue to talk about doing philosophy or the activity of philosophy and start talking about it.

It is a surprising philosophical move to disregard the particularity of the natural of (African) philosophy as much as it is tempting to invoke the notion of universal, so as to give an objective look of the discipline and activity of philosophy. Universal as a term, cannot exist without its particularities. What do I mean by this? For any set of categories to be qualified as universal, it will need more than one particularity to be validated. So, for universals to be called so in their account, they will need several instantiations to hold the status of universal. So, it is quite interesting to see some universals that are paraded as universals, but which do not have instantiations in a particular context. In the words of Matolino (2015), for a universal to be called truly universal, it should be sensitive to the particular experience of those specific conditions of the people.

Yet, ultimately, does the term philosophy fit into the category of universal? I think it would be worthwhile to attempt to answer this question as it is central to the current thesis. Several philosophical scholars have argued that philosophy is universal, but it is not only universal, it

is also universal in character and method (Hountondji, 1983; see also Bodunrin, 1991). So, what makes philosophy universal in character? As I have indicated above, there is a problem with seeing the position of philosophy as universal in the way that it has been used in African philosophical literature so far. Here, I am not attempting to deny the status of philosophy as a universal category. I am of the view that there are certain features or feature that are acceptable regarding the philosophy that can warrant it being seen as universal in character²⁶. In other words, my concern is with the route of arriving at the universality of philosophy. The way that a number of African philosophers in the past have arrived at the conclusion of the universal character of philosophy has been problematic in the light of the observation of the nature of universals. If my observation of the nature and status of universals is accurate, then the best way to arrive at a true universal is through particular. It is presumably unprecedented to make this claim, but it is not that complicated to substantiate this claim, as the nature of true universal can be instantiated. And the process of instantiating entails that we have to acknowledge more than one particular and what those particulars share in common. It is that or those commonalities features that rise to the status of universal.

But the universal philosophy that my eclecticism is ready to accept is one that does not disregard other specific voices in the table of knowledge production, and one that does not show some tendencies of imperialism. The eclecticism I have argued for in this study, acknowledges that the relationship between the universal and particular is that of a dependent. The notion of being “dependent” provides a platform status of all equality of humanity as they are rational beings who are capable of philosophizing. It also provides a platform for no imperialism and denigrating other epitomical positions. It is with this realization that we will be able to have conversations that have the potential of bringing about new concepts and developing the already existing ones. As an example, I draw on Matolino’s usage of the term justice in his critical dismissal of Jones’ universalism. Matolino argues that “Jones may respond by pointing out that a notion such as justice is universal, that its desirability is applicable to all humanity” (2015: 438). But Matolino (*ibid*) contends that if Jones takes this position seriously, he would have missed a salient point. The point is, as Matolino puts it, “justice will be

²⁶ See, Van Hook 1997 and Ikuenobe they both provide a full detailed analysis of the features that make philosophy universal in category.

interpreted differently and will be given different articulations by specific people. What others may think as the height of justice, others may not even admit, talk less of recognizing such as justice” (*ibid*). It is from, this set of conversations on the differences of concepts that we share amongst cultures that we will be able to formulate a true sense of philosophy.

This section has attempted to offer some reasons why there are some problems with the talks of philosophy as universal, which seem to be empty. I have shown that there are some problems with talking of philosophy as universal in a manner that African philosophers had been doing since the great debate. The issue remains that it perpetuates a false universal outlook that is tinted with bad perceptions of other cultures and their capabilities of producing knowledge. This has the tendency to instigate cultural imperialism.

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out to proffer an alternative perspective to address the problem of the debate between the Universalists and the Particularists in African philosophy. I have also argued, in this chapter, that an appropriate way to resolve the passionate debate that started in the 1980s in African philosophy is through understanding the nature and status of universals. It has been argued that the nature of universals is dependent on their particulars. This, in other words, is to say that for universal to attain the status of universal, there has to be a way with which we can instantiate that universal. With this in mind, I have further argued that this solution has a greater implication to our understanding of philosophy itself as a category of universal. Hence, I have argued for (African) philosophy to attain a true status of universal it needs to acknowledge its own particularities first, for it to be called a universal. It is in the light of this understanding that my eclecticism becomes worthwhile. I argue that the form of eclecticism I have proposed in this study acknowledges that the relationship between the universal and particular is that of a dependent. The notion of dependent provides a platform status of the equality of all of humanity, being composed of rational beings are capable of philosophizing. It also provides a platform for resistance to imperialism and not denigrating other epistemological positions.

Summary, General Conclusion and Recommendations

This thesis explored the philosophical impasse between the universalists and the particularists in African philosophy. This impasse stemmed from the philosophical commitments of the universalists and particularists on the nature of African philosophy. The debate arose around the question of what constitutes African philosophy as such, as well as, what set of characteristics should an African philosophy display for it to attain the status of a philosophical tradition. The study has demonstrated that the universalists and the particularists theses have failed to conjure up an African philosophical nature that is robust. This implies that for the nature of African philosophy to be a robust philosophy, it has to possess some African traditional thought and science. Hence, the analysis of the concept of philosophy, in view of Hountondji's conception, was an underscored view of the history of philosophy even in the Western philosophy. According to Ikuenobe (1997: 194), a philosophy that captures that history of philosophy, even in the Western world, as analytic tradition is offering a parochial conception of philosophy. Hence, he argues that "the Universalists' conception of formal philosophy, which in my view captures only the contemporary analytic tradition of Western philosophy, derives essentially from the critical and analytic approach of science" (Ikuenobe, 1997: 194-195). This is to say that the history of philosophy is multifaceted in nature, and not specific to analytic philosophy. This tendency seems to ignore the fact that before the origin of analytic philosophy, there was philosophy in Western philosophy. In actual fact, according to Ikuenobe, this position is not sufficient to capture all the historic perspectives and the traditions of Western philosophy (Ikuenobe, 1997).

The study has suggested that a solution to the problem between the universal and particular is feasible when we look at the nature and status of the universal. In the analysis of the nature and status of universals, we can claim as a fact that the commitment of the dualism between the particulars and universals, taken as the dichotomy between the particulars and universals is wrong. It has been shown that there are several scholars who are of view that the debate of the relationship between the universals and particulars is an insoluble problem. Hence, it has transcended centuries in philosophy.

Aristotle's criticism was in response to the Plato's claim that forms are *Katholou*. That is,

when translated, the problem of universals. In other words, the problem of one over many. So, in view of this, Plato's claims that forms are one over many. Aristotle's main concern, in his criticism of Plato's theory of forms, is on the separation of universals from particulars. Hence his commitment to dualism. But Aristotle suggested that there is no clear separation between particular and universal. Hence, Aristotle argues that:

... [the Platonists] treat forms both as universals and again, at the same time, as separate and as particulars. But it has been argued before that this is impossible. Those who said that the substances were universals combined these things in the same thing because they did not make them [the substances] the same as sensibles. (M 9, 1086a33-35).

In light of the above quotation, Aristotle argues that Platonians' have failed to demonstrate that forms are sensible things (1086a36). The Platonists have treated forms as universals and at the same time as particulars. In depth evaluation of this ambivalence on the status and the nature of forms leads to the observation that they treat forms as particulars that transcend their particular instances. Thus, this position seeks to combat the seductive position of reducing universals to particulars. This entails that there will be no clear combination between the universals and particulars. I have suggested that a solution to the problem of universals can be feasible through a process of reducing the distinction between the universals and particulars. Hence, I have argued that there is a dependent relationship between the universals and particulars. I have also argued that in Aristotle's position that there is a dependent relationship between universal and particular. But this dependent ontological status relationship between universal and particular is linear in nature. This in a simple sense, implies that universals cannot exist without particulars. But one fact to note is that, particulars do not depend on universals to exist. As a result, the relationship between the universals and particulars is linear in nature from particular towards universals. But this does not entail that particular relies on universals for their existence. This line of thought seeks to challenge the interpretation that treats universals as ontological independent of particulars. I have contended that particulars are concrete entities of a certain sort that can be accounted for metaphysically, and universals can be attained when we conceive that their particulars are instantiated. That is, universals are heavily embedded in the very nature of their particulars.

Nevertheless, in the last chapter, I contend that the usage of the term universal, as it had been

shown in the second, third and fourth chapters, is problematic. The usage of the term, universal has been conceived in terms of the independent status of particulars. Hence, Inusah's adamant position on his conception and interpretation of African philosophical literatures in the debate between the Universalists and Particularists. On this, Inusah suggests that the "universalists [are on the] quest for a transcultural philosophy". He further argues that "transcultural philosophy thus means a philosophy that goes beyond cultures" (2010: 20). That is to say that, philosophy is universal, and it will not be reduced into particular cultures that it seeks to analyse. The implication of this is that philosophy is conceived as universals, while particular cultures that philosophy might originate from are particular. Hence, I have proposed a different way of understanding the term universals from its ontological status. It has been argued, as cited in the immediate above, that the relations between the universals and particulars are such that in nature they are dependent on each other. But it's worth noting that this dependent ontological (status) relationship between universal and particular is linear in nature. This in a simple sense, implies that universals cannot exist without particular. But one thing to also note is that particulars do not depend on universals to exist.

It has been argued, in the final chapter, that this solution is vital to the problem of universals, regarding the debate about the nature of African philosophy and the eclecticism that I have suggested. I have also shown that the concept of philosophy can be universal but not in the sense that I have described above. Philosophy cannot to be universal in a sense that it is independent of its particular. But philosophy can be universal as long as it has its capacity of been instantiated. This is a set of universalness of philosophy that my eclecticism tends to endorse, as it is not informed by attitudes and tendencies of disregarding other specific voices on the table of knowledge production. My eclecticism occurs at the level of the ontological dependence between the universals and particulars. I differ with the formulation of the debate (between the Universalists and Particularists) in African philosophy because, African philosophy scholars have conceived the term universals in a way contrary to its true nature. I have contended that African philosophy scholars have neglected a key question regarding the nature and status of universals. This failure has resulted to some controversial conclusions. Presumably, this was because of the burden of African philosophical scholars attempting to gain recognition from their Western counterparts.

I suggest that further studies can be conducted in debate of the nature of African philosophy. But future studies should go past the debate of how the nature of philosophy can be conceived or imagined but focus on the actually doing African philosophy. I think the deliberation of whether African philosophy is universal or particular will be prevalent in the near future. This is so as my theory has attempted to show that the very discussions of how universal philosophy is not necessary as the very idea or term philosophy depends on its particular. What is prevalent is that an eclectic approach that acknowledges that universals depend on its particular to exist, then it would not be bizarre to conclude that there is a need for this form of eclecticism to be cross-examined. Maybe what needs to be questioned is how valid are its propositions and arguments? Hence, I also suggest that a further study can worry about this question also as to establish an ongoing debate of the nature of African philosophy.

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