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Conversationalism as an emerging method of thinking in and beyond African philosophy

In this paper, I employ an under-explored sub-Saharan African notion of 'relationship' to formulate a method that could ground discourses in African and intercultural philosophies. I claim that conversationalism, as the method is called, which is a new idea in African philosophy, might be an attractive model for thought if we take seriously the demand for equal and horizontal engagement especially in the field of intercultural philosophy. To do this, I will show what the method of conversationalism might look like in application. I will articulate a principle called Context-dependence of Value (CdV) that attempts to shift the paradigm of the truth of our propositions from the 'facts' which such 'propositions' assert to the 'context' in which those propositions are asserted, to show not only what makes conversationalism new but to also provide strong arguments on what makes it ultimately desirable for intercultural discourse and particularly now that some thinkers are calling for the decolonisation and Africanisation of philosophy.

Keywords: Conversational philosophy, African philosophy, method, conversational thinking, truth, Context-dependent of Value, conversationalism, intercultural philosophy.

1. Introduction

The question about method which is prominent in the African philosophical place will here be addressed, not in the regular style of whether there is such or not but in real theoretic terms in that I will attempt to formulate what can be called conversationalism as a methodic option for African and intercultural philosophies. Even though some African philosophers like Ada Agada (2015) may not see the need for this enterprise there are others who do, such as Maduakolam Osuagwu (Osuagwu 1999, 9-91) and K C Anyanwu (Anyanwu 2000, 57-58). In agreement with these latter two, I think the methodological discourse in African philosophy is inevitable. Avoiding it is like postponing doomsday. For example, we, the practitioners of African philosophy, will someday come to a point where we must say something about the methodological disposition of African philosophy. Evidently, until African philosophers invest creative energy in clarifying their method(s), the problem of the "double bind" will continue to hang around the discipline. Robert Bernasconi captures the 'double bind' problem as follows: "either African philosophy is so similar to Western philosophy that it makes no distinctive contribution and effectively disappears; or it is so different that its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt" (1997, 188). This may simply suggest that African philosophy done with Western formulated methods might fall short of a truly philosophical tradition in its own right. Indeed, it seems plausible to say that until the methodological dispositions of African philosophy are clarified, "...its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt". And by method I mean more of a tool for thinking rather than a school of thought, the latter being what ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, universalist, literary and the hermeneutic approaches represent. No doubt, these methodological discussions I am calling for are as important as they are imperative if we are to add another meaningful layer to the discourse on philosophy in Africa.

Thus articulating the method(s) of our enterprise might be something that can justify it and entitle it to the name 'African philosophy' as a tradition clearly different from, say, Western philosophy. But besides this, there is a lingering concern in academia about the relevance of philosophy as a discipline in today's world. Perhaps the hope and survival of the venture of philosophy, in this post-truth and postcolonial age, may now be sought outside of the Greco-European world. Impressively, Michel Foucault shares this optimism when he observes "[T]he crisis of Western thought is identical to the end of imperialism [...] [F]or it is the end of the era of Western philosophy. Thus if philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside Europe...." (1999, 113). That new context for the resurgence of philosophy might as well be in Africa where African philosophers could shoulder the responsibility of producing the pedestal for the so-called future philosophy.

I am of the view that philosophy is still relevant to our contemporary world particularly in the areas of cross-cultural conversation and understanding. But philosophers must learn to turn on the light of reason and focus it on the worry of today's world. Our world today, despite all of its progress, is in a constant state of tension brewed by our failure to communicate across cultural, ethnic, religious and epistemic borders and understand ourselves as human beings with a common destiny. This tension, it appears, is not something that technological advancement can douse. It is squarely something which the light of reason can smother. It does seem, therefore, that philosophy still has a mammoth role to play in making our world habitable, tolerant, peaceful and more equal. This is what philosophers must cash out on, and it should not matter from where the best strategy comes. The methodological disposition of conversational philosophy, an under-explored strategy from the African place, aims at not merely bringing humans together to talk to themselves but, more importantly, it focuses on getting them to talk meaningfully and to understand themselves. This, I suppose, may require an unbranded mechanism like the conversational method.

'Understanding' in a multicultural setting, we must admit, is not an easy goal to achieve. Often, there is a verticalisation of relationships. One cultural bloc or people set the rules of these relationships (whether epistemic, political or economic), perhaps not always with the intention to dominate the 'other' but that is what always turns out to be the case. They assume, quite in ignorance, that this is how things should proceed; that their own cultural particular is the internationally sanctioned modus operandi for diplomatic, economic and intellectual relations. But the fact is that what is usually regarded as the international, universalisable or globalisable rules of epistemic engagement are, ironically, the ones set up by the dominant culture. Or, more appropriately, the ones which a certain forerunning culture developed over time and now prescribes to the other trailing cultures as something that is universally granted. Interestingly, they seem to assume that whatever the other trailing cultures have is inferior and that it should not be a problem for them to realise and embrace the superior universally grantable idea from the West. When cross-cultural engagements take place on the bases of these one-sided principles of value allocation, most times, it is possible not only for the 'other' to be disgruntled but for 'understanding' to fail either at the beginning or in the long run. I blame this scenario partly on the Greco-European logical mechanism for the allocation of values to propositions. An intellectual culture was set up by Aristotle and was further advanced by George Boole, who devised the mechanism in his algebraic logic for the allocation of a strict and unique value to each proposition. And this pattern was further explained by Gottlob Frege when in discussing the foundations of (Greco-European) thought proposed the following principle: "never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only

in the context of a proposition" (1960, xxii). What this entails, broadly, is that any given proposition necessarily has to have a unique value to be determined only by the facts it asserts. But is this really correct at all times? My thinking is in the negative. Yes, it may be correct to assert that this logical pattern is true of all cultures and all peoples but maybe not all of the time. In a later section, I will advance this argument further using the principle of Context-dependence of Values (CdV), which states that premium should more accurately be placed on contexts in which propositions are asserted rather than on the facts asserted in such propositions in order to correctly allocate truth values to propositions.

In this article, I will use the African notion of 'relationship' to formulate the method of conversationalism and provide clarifications on its structure and mechanism. I will demonstrate that conversationalism is a methodic extension beyond the gains of dialogue and polylogue. I will employ the principle of CdV to argue for the novelty and viability of conversationalism. I will then provide strong arguments to show that conversationalism deserves a space in the methodological accumulations of philosophy especially in these times of intercultural philosophy.

2. The Method of Conversationalism

It is important to first clarify that the method which I seek to develop in this work called conversationalism is my own idea, representing what I think is another plausible way to philosophise in and beyond Africa. It is not something peculiar to Africa or something one can blindly generalise across African cultures. In the course of my arguments, I will make some claims. One that might raise some eyebrows would be that the raw material of my methodological construct, such as the notion of 'relationship' or 'communion', is something found in a rich reserve in sub-Saharan Africa. However, I am neither the first nor the only one to have made this claim. A host of other scholars have also made similar claim in different ways. I will highlight some of them later in the paragraph. One must insist nonetheless that the claim that this notion of relationship is found in many places in sub-Saharan Africa is neither false nor over-stated, and yet it does not in any way commit one to saying that it cannot be found in places outside Africa or even in greater proportion. What I claim here is simply that this notion of relationship understood as 'a state of coming together to share and care' is replete in the life-world of different cultures in the sub-Sahara regions and I here wish to tap into that to frame a method of thinking which can, to all intents and purposes, serve scholars beyond Africa. I should add that I intend to frame a conception of this notion of relationship that will be more sophisticated than the world-view version found in different African cultures. In a way, it is like finding a raw material and turning it into a finished product before exportation. Since the

context of this work is African philosophy, I will ground the new method in African philosophy but it would be a mistake to interpret this as restricting the application of the method to African philosophy or even to claim that it is unique to Africa.

The idea of relationship or communion or mutual interdependence is something that is inherent in many a sub-Saharan African culture. African thinkers like Pantaleon Iroegbu (1995) and Innocent Asouzu (2007) have appealed to this notion in developing '*uwa* ontology' and '*ibuanyidanda* ontology' respectively. Scholars like Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984), Kwame Gyekye (1997), Polycarp Ikuenobe (2006), and Bernard Matolino (2014) have employed it in constructing socio-political theories of individual-community interaction. Thaddeus Metz (2011, 2013, 2015 & 2017), specifically, has exploited it in developing what he calls an African theory of relational ethics. In southern Africa, several scholars working on *ubuntu* thought have also appealed to this notion in developing various strands of *ubuntu* ontology and ethics. These include Mogobe Ramose (2005), Leonhard Praeg (2014) and Fainos Mangena (2016).

But what do I mean by relationship? Relationship as I conceive it in this work is a wilful, creative and critical epistemic experience which two agents known as *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* share with the intention to create new concepts and open up new vistas for thought. Here, I seek to exemplify this idea of relationship using the methodological framework I call conversationalism. To converse, elementarily, suggests a coming together of some sort which is a prerequisite to any form of relationship. So, conversationalism presupposes a relationship although a type of relationship that is different from what happens when two lovers or two people who hate each other come together. The preceding example describes a 'state' whereas my conception is a 'procedure' and this procedure is critical, creative and complementary.

From the foregoing, it appears that this notion is central to philosophical thinking in sub-Saharan Africa but adequate attempt is yet to be made, to the best of my knowledge, to formulate a method for African philosophy from this notion of relationship. It would therefore not be out of place to attempt to tease out a method of thought from the notion of relationship. Asouzu's method of complementary reflection that prescribes how one may think in a complementary way is the only attempt that comes close. However, his attempt still falls short of a clear formal expression. Besides, it was presented as custom-made for his doctrine of *ibuanyidanda* ontology. Here, I take up the task of formally articulating a method on the basis of the African notion of relationship for the fields of African and intercultural philosophies specifically but which can be employed by philosophers working on diverse topics in any part of the world. I have called that new method conversationalism bearing in mind that to converse is a form

of engagement and this is a relationship of some sort. It will be my burden in this section to show how this relationship-driven procedure can amount to a veritable method of thinking.

What might a method of philosophising from Africa look like? Conversationalism as a method is not just a procedure for an informal exchange of opinions between two people; that may be the literal meaning of the 'word' conversation—something that can describe what the Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka did with his famous doctrine of philosophic sagacity. Here, I deal with the 'concept' conversationalism and not the 'word' conversation. Oruka's strategy is similar to Socratic dialectic, which is about mutual argumentative exchange between individuals called interlocutors in which one asks questions and the other attempts to supply the answers. Such questions are intended to compel one to think critically and may lead to the revision or even abandonment of one's initial position. This method is also called *maieutics* meaning midwifery. Socrates himself is described as a philosophical midwife who helps his interlocutors to bring forth the ideas laden in them. It is in this connection that the method is named after Socrates.

Granted that the conversational relationship takes some measures of inspiration from Socratic dialectic, it is important to note that they are not quite the same. Both of them prioritise the revision of positions and the opening of new vistas for thought but conversational relationship does not place a premium on *telos* as does the Socratic dialectic. The goal of the Socratic Method appears to be geared towards 'proving a position false and establishing the truth of its negation'. The problem with this will become obvious when we consider a scenario in which an imaginary Ptolemy uses the Socratic Method in a dialogue with one of his students. Let us suppose that Ptolemy's student holds a position that supports a heliocentric astronomical model. Would Ptolemy, a skilful argumentator and a believer in the geocentric model, and having the advantage of the scientific knowledge available at the time, not get his student to agree with him that the heliocentric model is false and that its negation is true? The answer is yes. Also, if this happens, would it still not be the case that later on someone like Nicholas Copernicus would complete a proof that the geocentric model is in fact false and that the heliocentric model, previously proven false by Ptolemy, is in fact true? Again, the answer is yes. What does this reveal about the Socratic Method? It reveals that it is capable of exposing philosophy to future danger if it allows for the certainty of the truth of philosophy to be established today on the basis of inaccurate facts only for it to be disestablished tomorrow when more accurate facts become available. For this, the conversational method prioritises the sustenance of the engagement over the outcome of such engagements.

Further, the conversational method represents a higher sophistication of portions of the Socratic Method. For one, it is not an engagement that can occur only at the individual level, it can also occur at cultural or group level. Thus for this, the conversational relationship occurs at both micro (individual) and macro (cultural) levels which paves the way for what is called intercultural philosophy. Also, the strategy of the conversational method is arumaristic rather than dialectic. I will explain this presently.

The idea of conversationalism goes back to the Igbo notion of '*iṛụka*' or '*arụmarụ-ụka*' which roughly translates to 'engaging in a critical exchange or conversation' and has two senses: 1. 'the act' [but *not* the state] of engaging in a critical exchange; and 2. 'the mechanism' for engaging in a critical exchange. While the first sense describes its doctrine of conversational philosophy, the second sense describes its methodic ambience. When corrupted, the adjective 'arumaristic' may be derived to qualify any relationship that is characterised by a critical exchange. The noun arumaristics therefore, may be defined as a type of critical encounter that involves the reshuffling of thesis and anti thesis, each time at a higher level without the expectation of synthesis.

As a method, conversationalism is a formal procedure for assessing the relationships of opposed variables in which thoughts are shuffled through disjunctive and conjunctive modes to constantly recreate a fresh thesis and anti-thesis each time at a higher level of discourse without the expectation of the synthesis. Conversationalism presupposes relationship(s) between '*nwa-nsa*' who is the epistemic agent that created an idea and therefore shoulders the responsibility of defending, clarifying or revising it and '*nwa-nju,*' who can be defined as an epistemic agent that questions the viability and veracity of an idea created by *nwa-nsa*. This relationship is a critical one and may be described as a process of 'creative struggle'. Creative, in that its foremost goal is to birth a new concept by opening up new vistas for thought; struggle, in that the epistemic agents involved pit themselves against each other in a continuous disagreement. Thus a conversational relationship is an arumaristic relationship.

There are a few things that are worth noting in the conversational or arumaristic type of engagement as distinguished from a dialectic type of relationship. First, a conversational relationship is not a dialectic relationship in which components of thesis and anti-thesis come together to form the synthesis. It is rather an arumaristic relationship in which the struggle between thesis and anti-thesis is not just between two competing positions that culminates in the emergence of a new position (synthesis) made up of the components of the two rivals. In an arumaristic relationship, there is only one position at a time and the party that holds and defends it is called *nwa-nsa*. The philosophic duty of

the rival party called *nwa-nju* is to question the viability and veracity of that position and by so doing compel *nwa-nsa* to revise, enrich or abandon the position. It is in this process that new concepts and thoughts are created. Thus while conversationalism promises a certain degree of epistemological alignment between two seemingly opposed variables, fundamental differences will always persist due to opposing ontological loyalties of the variables. This perpetuates the reshuffling of thesis and anti-thesis and frustrates the emergence of synthesis. In a dialectic relationship, this encounter between thesis and anti-thesis is not characterised by 'creative struggle,' it is rather characterised by, for wont of a better description, 'creative surrender'. Creative surrender may be defined as a process in which compromise and concession mitigate on the encounter between thesis and anti-thesis in order to yield synthesis.

Second, in an arumaristic relationship, thesis does not emerge out of the womb of synthesis; it is re-invented by *nwa-nsa*. The incessant questioning by *nwa-nju* compels *nwa-nsa* to do constant evaluation of his position in light of new ideas and where necessary, he makes needful revisions to his position. This is, in my estimation, a procedure that accounts for knowledge growth and intellectual progress rather than dialectics-based methods such as dialogue and polylogue.

Third, what happens in a relationship between X and Y within the framework of conversational thinking can be described as complementation rather than synthesis. Both complement themselves in that while the one needs the other to re-invent itself at a higher level of discourse, the other needs the one to fulfil its philosophic duty. In the end, what happens is a continuous progress in thought. They do not reach a compromise by contributing components towards the formation of a new order—this is what synthesis is about in a dialectic relationship.

Fourth, in an arumaristic relationship, the thesis has a transgenerational life-span. It keeps being re-invented and grows in sophistication, but in a dialectic relationship, a thesis's life-span is generational. It fizzles out in each generation allowing room for the emergence of another thesis to take its place.

To help make sense of the above points, it is important to explain how this method of conversationalism could be applied in practical terms. To begin with, conversationalism has two prominent theses, namely the ontological thesis and the logical thesis. It is from the spectra of these two that this method can be understood.

Briefly, the ontological thesis states that 'independent realities exist not as isolated units but as interconnected entities in a network'. Conceived in this way, conversationalists think of reality as one big network of variables some of which are opposed to some others, yet they are interconnected.

This accounts for why, at some point, even opposed variables that are in a disjunctive motion apart from each other come to discover the necessity of mutual interaction and enter the path of conjunctive motion once again. So, there is a limit to how far apart the disjunctive motion could take the opposed variables—that limit is known as the complementary bar. However, despite the possibility of binary complementation, there is also a limit to how close the opposed variables can relate—that limit is called the *benoke* point. This concept is derived from a collection of Igbo words: *bere* which means 'reaching' and *n'oke* which means 'the limit or terminal point'. Put together '*berenoke*' or '*benoke*' for short means 'reaching the limit or terminal point'. This is the point beyond which opposed variables cannot get closer.

One could therefore see that despite their similarity there is a difference between a conversational relationship and a Hegelian dialectical relationship. Below is the diagram of a conversational curve that can enable us to measure the conversational relationships of seemingly opposed variables.

Definition: A Conversational Curve is a graphic representation of the aru-maristic relationship between opposed variables, call them *nwa-nsa* and its nemesis *nwa-nju*. It is drawn with the motions of conversation on the vertical axis and the conversationalists themselves on the horizontal axis.

Conversational Curve:
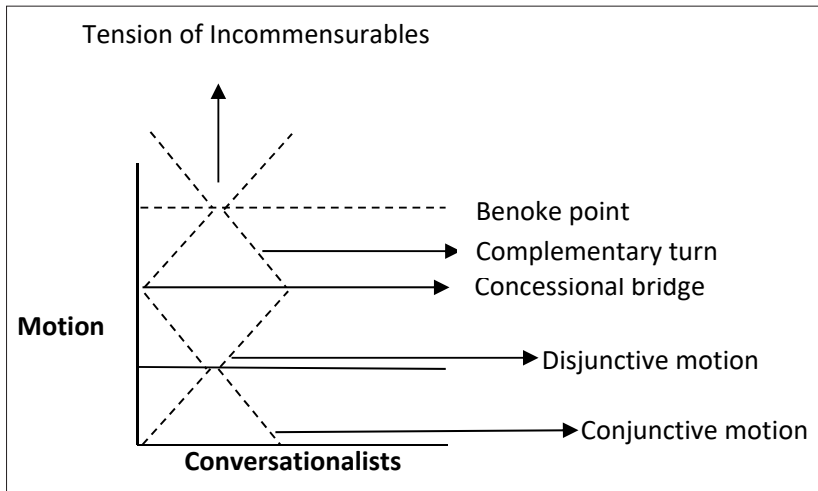
In the diagram above, one can observe the dotted disjunctive v-shaped lines which demonstrate how variables move apart and diminish their contact and interaction; and the conjunctive lines which demonstrate how seemingly opposed variables come close to interact. One can also observe a concessional bridge defined as a mechanism for determining when complementation has become necessary and has begun to take place between two opposed variables; and a complementary turn, which is defined as a mechanism for determining when the closest point of complementation has been reached. On top is the *benoke* point where the conjunctive lines could not meet and which is a point beyond which opposed variables cannot get closer. Finally, there is one called tension of incommensurables, defined as a mechanism for determining when the complementary relationship has collapsed. I will explain these concepts in more details in the next section.

The second thesis is the logical thesis and it states that 'values are to be allocated to propositions not on the bases of the facts such propositions assert but on the bases of the contexts in which those propositions are asserted'. In this regard, one can see that context upsets fact. It is from this logical thesis that I articulate the principle of CdV, which I will discuss in more detail later in this work. What can immediately be gleaned from this thesis is that in conversationalism, we look at truth as something somewhat less rigid than the Aristotelian logical formulation as well as the Boolean algebraic equation would have us believe. The condensed idea in conversational thinking can therefore be stated: 'The truth-value of propositions could vary from one context to the other.'

Thus conversationalism as a method aims at a non-synthetic outcome i.e. it does not broach the transculturality of truth; it is rather, arumaristic. What conversational thinking does is the affirmation of what can be called the 'intercommunication of truth' which means that truths emanating from different contexts can recognise and confirm one another, but that is how much we can expect. Thus at contextual levels, truths have a life of their own but are somehow connected. One truth may confirm the other even though they may carry different values for the same set of facts – a practical solidarity of truths, if you will. For example, the proposition 'one needs water to stay alive' when contextualised in the Sahara Desert where one is dehydrating and in the River Niger where one is drowning, respectively; they will carry different values even though they contain the same set of facts. However, despite the difference in values, one confirms the other. Water could save your life in the desert but the same water could kill you in the river and vice versa. These truths are in solidarity, each enables one to understand the other better and I think this is supposed to be the drive behind all genuine efforts geared towards intercultural philosophy. Conversationalism epitomises this mechanism through a process known as

creative struggle—a continuous arumaristics without synthesis. This method is a perpetual process and a critical continuum by which the African philosopher or any philosopher for that matter can assess the relationships of diverse but interconnected entities, cultures and peoples, etc. The reshuffling of theses and anti-theses is a revision of some sort in which each set manifests a higher level of discourse.

On the whole, this method of conversationalism points to the idea of relationships among interdependent, interrelated and interconnected realities existing in a network whose peculiar truth conditions can more accurately and broadly be determined within specific contexts. This relationship exists even between opposed variables propelled and regulated by the conjunctive and the disjunctive mechanisms that seek to preserve diversity while enhancing inclusion and focusing on the progress of thought.

In conversational thinking, thoughts are expressed as variables in the structure of binary complementarity. But that two variables can complement does not mean that they lose their identities and merge into one. In a conversational relationship, their encounter is arumaristic which means that they come together and break up according to necessity. Thus two seemingly opposed variables can be in a disjunctive motion determined by their ontological variance and can revert to a conjunctive motion determined by their ontological equality.[1] These motions represent the continuing reshuffling of sets of theses and anti-theses. A disjunctive motion is slowed down by what is called 'concessional bridge' – defined as a mechanism for determining when complementation has become necessary and has begun to take place. It is this steep bridge that eventually transforms the disjunctive motion into a conjunctive motion. At the other end, a conjunctive motion brings opposed variables to their closest relationship at what can be called a 'complementary turn' – defined as a mechanism for determining when the closest point of complementation has been reached – and is transformed into another disjunctive motion by what can be called a 'tension of incommensurables' – defined as a mechanism for determining when a complementary relationship has collapsed.

In practical terms, let us imagine that agent X (code-named *nwa-nsa*) develops a theory A that claims to have systematised *ubuntu* as an ethical framework fit for modern application with a load of new concepts to drive the theory; agent Y (code-named *nwa-nju*) may decide to take agent X to task on the viability and veracity of his theory. He raises questions that will upset the

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1   Ontological variance refers to existential properties that make two entities different while ontological equality refers to existential properties that make two entities similar.

theory and as a result compels agent X to continue to fortify his theory, revise it or even abandon it. This process is known as creative struggle. Now this is where one might raise the curious question; is this all there is about the method of conversationalism? The answer is No! The turning point occurs at this juncture in that the conversationalists i.e. *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju*, are not expected to resolve this struggle, ever! On the one hand, every answer will give birth to new questions and with it new concepts. On the other hand, every question is expected to open new vistas for thought and elevate the discourse to a higher level. Thus the ultimate goal of the conversational method is the sustenance of the conversation and not the final resolution of questions. What this implies is that while methods such as dialogue and polylogue, following from a Hegelian type of dialectics, are open to the unity of opposed variables in a synthesis, conversationalism that rides on the crest of arumaristics regards synthesis as anathema. I will further explore the radical dimension of this method of thought by analysing the CdV principle which is the offshoot of the logical thesis discussed above.

3. Further Justification of the Method of Conversationalism: The Context-dependence of Value

Here, I employ an idea I have discussed in a number of works for some years now but which I now dub the 'principle of CdV' to justify the claim that what we call truth may not always be dependent on the collection of facts that a proposition asserts but rather on the context in which that proposition is asserted. Before I discuss this principle in detail, I would like to clarify the relationship between conversationalism and CdV using a geometrical analogy. In conversationalism, epistemic agents and contexts can be thought of in geometrical terms as points, each capable of independent self-manifestation, meaning that it can be analysed in ways not subject to its interaction with other entities, and complementary self-manifestation, meaning that it can be analysed in ways subject to its interaction with other entities. Think of independent self-manifestation as points without lines connecting them and think of complementary self-manifestation as points connected together by a line or lines. As any distance between two points for example is a line, think of this line as a conversational relationship between epistemic agents and contexts represented by such points. CdV then affirms the individual identities of epistemic agents and contexts that are captured in conversationalism and upholds their viability such that we may now be able to, following the complementary mode of the conversational technique, talk about facts relative to contexts and their interrelation rather than stop at the framework of propositions that carry such facts in a non-complementary mode.

Conversationalism as a method begins from the premise that realities, though independent, exist in a network of interrelation in which the ideas of difference and equality are inherent, and do not exist as isolated units. In this complementary framework, conversationalism promotes equal inter-party engagement in a special way, i.e. by levelling the ground and ensuring a totally horizontal relationship; it focuses on the process that leads to the production of new concepts and thoughts rather than on a final outcome; it upholds the critical rigour of philosophy by discouraging definite answers; and relocates truth value from the facts embedded in propositions to the context of propositions themselves thereby making the notion of truth function dynamic.

From the preceding, conversationalism riding on the crest of CdV seems to affirm relativism and to oppose the objectivity of truth. The question is, what is my motivation for urging us to switch from an objective analysis of truth captured in theories like correspondence to a relativised option? My motivation is due to the apparent fluctuations inherent in history. What is asserted as objectively true at one point in history turns out to become false at some other later historical time when circumstances change or when other facts become available. Take the example of the geocentric and the heliocentric model of the universe as one case. Consider also the case of colonialism, thought to be just at some historical time but now considered to be an unjust ideology that decimated, robbed and even underdeveloped a continent like Africa, as Walter Rodney states.[2] Cases like these abound in our epistemic edifice. Are we supposed to pretend that they have no credibility? No, we should not! This was what motivated the Einstenian physics in modern science. As much as the idea of truth relativity alarmed the scientific world, in practice, research has shown that it is a fact of life. Whether in the sciences or in the humanities, many cases abound in which contexts determined the values of facts. Yet, this does not in any way vitiate the credibility of objective truth. We also know from common sense that objective truth makes a lot of logical sense. Where then does this apparent paradox lead us? One way to look at it would be to think about a middle course, something that removes the straitjacket that appears to characterise both objective and relative truths. The straitjacket is not only a problem for objective truth; it is also a problem for relativism. For example, relativism says that every truth is relative except the truth of its own assertion. That would make the truth of relativism objective at least, and this straitjacket contradicts its basic assertion. So, the problem is that if we remove this straitjacket from objectivism it would lose its meaning; and if we remove it from relativism, it would lose its foundation and collapse. This is a problem in

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2   See Walter Rodney. *How Europe Under-developed Africa*. Lagos: Panaf, 2009. This work describes in horrific detail the evils of colonialism on Africa.

foundationalism as well as in the theory of justification broadly conceived. I here admit quite humbly that conversationalism and its handmaid, the CdV, may not escape from this problem and I do not have an immediate solution either. But the encouraging thing is that I do not think that the presenting of this problem constitutes adequate grounds to deter me from constructing a pro-relativism theory as I do in this work. My reasons are as follows: 1. History teaches us that contexts play vital roles in determining the values of facts. 2. Philosophy in our time seems destined to cross borders and if intercultural philosophy is to make any sense at all, we must be charitable and defend a certain strand of epistemic relativism. This definitely would come at a cost but I would prefer to invite other thinkers to dwell on what happens as a consequence rather than shy away from making what I think is a reasonable epistemic commitment.

However, I do believe that my inclination to relativism can profit from a reasonable moderation. Thus I am motivated to anchor my idea of CdV on Kwasi Wiredu's position concerning John Dewey's warranted assertibility embedded in the idea of notions of truth[3]. Wiredu however quarrels with Dewey for failing to highlight the importance of 'point of view' as contrasted from 'notions of truth'. In this regard, Wiredu appears to claim that besides objective truth, there may be another point of view which is a rationally warranted judgement. What this suggests is that the truth or falsity of propositions can be analysed relative to the contexts in which they are stated and such may be judged to be rationally warranted. So, for example, while CdV taken alone implies that person X's assertion in the 18th Century that colonialism was justified is true relative to the context in which person X asserts it, this alternative point of view, based on the reading of Wiredu, would imply that although we take seriously the context in which the proposition was asserted, we nevertheless can judge person X's assertion to be false in light of what we now know, i.e., that there are overwhelming context-independent reasons for thinking that colonialism was unjustifiable – notwithstanding the particular context in which its truth was previously asserted. The advantage of this alternative approach is that it is not committed to some objective, mind-independent truth, which I have described as a straitjacket, but nevertheless it supports the goal of intercultural philosophising which aims at affirming the epistemic credibility of different cultures or philosophical traditions as rationally warrantable judgements. On the basis of the accommodation of another point of view capable of being rationally warranted, progress in philosophy may be imagined as approximating as much as possible these types

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3   See Kwasi Wiredu. *Philosophy and an African Culture.* 1980. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 157-158. See footnote 11 as well.

of judgements through intercultural engagements. This is the main focus of my argument for the relative evaluation of the truth of propositions.

Therefore, CdV can be stated as saying: 'Propositions can be evaluated true or false not, as we suppose, on the bases of the facts they assert but rather, on the bases of the contexts in which they assert those facts.' One of the direct implications of this principle is that facts would not be the primary ingredients for determining the values of propositions, contexts would be. And, of course, this may upset the notion of truth peddled in the traditional theories of truth in which there is a primary focus on the relationship between facts and propositions that assert them. I would like to think of this seeming anomaly as a scenario in which context upsets fact. Call it 'factual anomaly' if you will, but it points to a revelation that facts may not always be what they seem to be. Metaphorically, we can say with hesitation that facts *prostitute* themselves from context to context.

Another implication is that in intercultural philosophy, different philosophical traditions represent viable contexts as opposed to the dogma of one universal tradition. So, truth manifests from context to context from which a form of intercommunication or solidarity can be exercised. To engage across borders, different philosophical traditions require a tool that is not only accessible to all, but usable as well. It is for this need that I formulate conversationalism as a method that is not border-biased to guide African philosophy specifically and intercultural enquiries generally.

On the whole, what the CdV really indicates to philosophers is 'never ask for the value of a proposition except in a specific context'. When extended, this also applies to the truths of philosophy. Here, I take philosophy to be a tradition-by-tradition activity rather than a towering architectonic structure that imposes one cultural mind view on other cultures. On their own, when not placed in any contexts, most propositions are value-neutral. For example, consider the proposition 'you need to drink water to stay alive'. When considered from the Boolean algebraic equation, this proposition will have the value 1. But this may be a little hasty if we take into consideration, as I think we should, such a serious concern as the context of that proposition. For one who is in the middle of the Sahara Desert on a hot afternoon, the value of the proposition will be 1; but for one who is drowning in the River Niger, even if on a hot afternoon, that proposition cannot be true, its Boolean value will be 0. A drowning man has probably gulped more than enough water and may not need more. What he does need to stay alive is air, more water will simply kill him. The preceding water analogy is one of several examples in which context upsets fact.

All of these attributes are attractive to the demands of intercultural philosophy which some consider the future of philosophy. Franz Wimmer (1996, 45-57)

argues that it is not merely another branch of philosophy but the direction in which philosophy in this age should go. For von Hamid Reza Yousefi, "Intercultural philosophy is not a branch of traditional philosophy, but rather a correction and extension of the same" (2007, 199). Yousefi further shows that "intercultural philosophy is based on the fact that other peoples also possess Reason and rationality. The answer to the oft-posed question 'what's the good of intercultural philosophy' is found here. Accordingly, one of the tasks of intercultural philosophy is to question and relativize the self-erected claim of the universality of views from reductive philosophy in terms of the history of ideas, philosophy and development. In so doing, a dialogue may be conducted as equals between traditions of thought" (2007, 121). Also, Heinz Kimmerle for his part explains that what is at stake is not merely "attaining recognition for intercultural philosophy as a greater or smaller specialization of philosophy", but that "[T]he philosophical contribution to a renegotiation of the relationship between cultures is decisive for the status of philosophy today." "This contribution", Kimmerle insists, "concerns one of the main issues of our time – upon whose solution the possibility of a humane and dignified life greatly depends." He goes on to note that, "it is for this reason that philosophy must either become intercultural, or else become nothing more than an academic preoccupation void of societal relevance" (1994, 31). Murray Hofmeyr (51-76) engages with Kimmerle's submission on the need for intercultural philosophy resting on the idea of difference and equality which is the pre-condition for a true dialogue. He, however, points out that there is both a promise and a problem for this new orientation. Intercultural philosophy represents an intellectual attempt to reclaim our best human ideals but the question of whose method and rules will always raise the problem of dominance and the schism between the self and the other. Hofmeyr appears to suggest that negotiating this schism should not be expected to be easy and I think he is correct. This is perhaps where the advocates of dialogue and polylogue as methods run into problems. For example, in a bid to overcome all obstacles and indeed, all divisive mindsets, it is easy for the frameworks of dialogue and polylogue as tools of intercultural engagement to become compromised. Talk of tolerance will come in and with it, compromise. I understand when thinkers like Yousefi argues that "the research on tolerance and communication, since relationships between cultures can only be peacefully cultivated if the dialogues between them are established and carried out on the basis of mutual tolerance" (2007, 120). But it is not always clear when the demand for tolerance extends to compromise. Yes, we want to see different philosophical traditions engage and on equal platforms, but we do not want this engagement to derail from the path of rigour and become sociological.

Advocates of relational equality like Kimmerle, Adhar Mall and Wimmer contend that the cause of intercultural philosophy will be better served using

a methodic ambience that encourages fair and equitable engagement. While Kimmerle (1994) and Mall (2000) favour the mechanism of dialogue, Wimmer (1996, 2007) opts for polylogue. Obviously, the only difference between these two methods concerns the number of units that may enter the engagement. While dialogue emphasises two, polylogue gives room for as many as there are. Their common strength appears to be twisted around the admiration for fair, tolerant and equal engagement. However, I find it plausible to claim that both dialogue and polylogue have a common weakness as well. Because of their over-commitment to levelling the ground of engagement for all parties and causing actors to engage across cultures with mutual sense of concern, they unwittingly lead to an overdose of sentiments by expecting a form of consensus, almost in desperation, from every possible intercultural encounter. This mindset, arguably, could water down the philosophical rigour in both dialogue and polylogue. It does not matter if the advocates of the two methods are willing to admit it. Every mother thinks her cooking skills are spectacular and hardly admits that her soup might not be delicious. Perhaps, common sense will arbitrate between my judgement about those two methods and what the advocates think about their methods. Some recent advocates of dialogue as a philosophical method like Bruce Janz (2016, 41-42) will argue for its sustained rigour but it is hard to convince anyone that where compromises and consensus are on the table, that this clinging on to rigour will last the stretch. So, since this doubt exists and it is credible enough, I am inclined to toy with something new and more reliable hence, my proposal for the conversational method in which priority is with the sustenance of this rigour and the sustenance of the engagement. Dialogue/polylogue may also prioritise engagement at the beginning but soon afterwards, it tends to want so much more. A good dialogue/polylogue ends with peace and actors will most times want to make their dialogue a good one and there may be nothing anyone can do about this sentiment.

I am not writing off dialogue/polylogue just yet. In fact, in dialogue/polylogue, actors disagree and agree, the argument may be tense at some point, and there may not even be a final outcome, and the very activity of dialoguing/polyloguing, the opening up of new vistas and different perspectives, is in itself rewarding! It may just be as desirable as achieving consensus. No one would be able to doubt the philosophical richness of the methods of dialogue and polylogue. Yet, it would not be out of place to observe and to humbly admit that dialogue and polylogue may not promise incessant questioning and sustained critical intensity for the reasons associated with the ideals of peace, tolerance, consensus, synthesis and, possibly, compromise. I think that dialogue and polylogue would be most fitting for comparative philosophy where we compare and contrast the methodological, metaphysical, epistemological and ethical theories of two or more distinct

philosophical traditions with the aim of testing their commensurability or otherwise. There is little or no room for intellectual aggression of the kind that would require actors to make judgements on the viability and otherwise of one another's positions. Unlike comparative philosophy, intercultural philosophy is full of animadversions. Actors across cultures are expected not merely to engage but robustly, to make critical judgement on the positions of one another. Intercultural philosophers thus are constantly constructing, deconstructing and re-constructing where the aim is to extend the frontiers of human knowledge as a whole.

It is true, as Yousefi says, that intercultural philosophy aims at establishing the reign of what he calls 'communicative Reason' which affirms that all cultures and peoples possess and employ the tool of reason with which to fairly engage with the others. And that the idea of all-embracing universal reason as Meinrad Hebga (1958, 223) calls it is a dogma; but there is a level to which particular cultural manifestations of reason will be watered down and will lose their philosophical venom. Reason needs to be constantly challenged not pampered. But dialogue and polylogue do not seem to guarantee this for the full stretch. So, one sees that there is something fundamentally weak inherent in these two methods when employed in intercultural discourse and we as philosophers must be courageous enough to admit it.

Corroborating these observations, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their magisterial work *What is Philosophy?* clearly point out that philosophy is not dialogue or communication, "which only works under the sway of opinions in order to create 'consensus' and not concepts" (1994, 6). This exchange of opinions between people whether one calls it communication or dialogue is what Deleuze and Guattari ridicule as a Western idea of democratic relationship of say-your-opinion-and-it-will-count, which for them "has never produced a single concept" (1994, 6). Proper tools of philosophy, they argue, yield new concepts and not consensus because philosophy is that discipline that is concerned with the production of concepts hence, "...the following definition of philosophy can be taken as being decisive: knowledge through pure concepts" (1994, 7).

Obviously, we want to do intercultural philosophy but we must not aspire to do it the easy way. Dialogue and polylogue constitute the easy way to intercultural philosophy because they primarily want to arrive at an objective truth or, put differently, at a transcultural truth. But it is difficult to conceive a transcultural truth. If assertions 1, 2, 3, for example, in contexts A, B, C, are all true, what would become the truth value of assertions 1, 2, 3 when collected in context D considering the possibility that 1 and 2 or 1 and 3 or 2 and 3 or 1, 2, 3 may all be contradictory? This is the foremost challenge that confronts the bid for transculturality of

truth suggested by dialogue and polylogue respectively. Although, the idea of different notions of truth may be hard to defend, another point of view, as Wiredu describes, of the same notion of truth may be feasible given the easily demonstrable idea that circumstances alter the truth of propositions in different contexts. The intercultural philosophers who promote dialogue and polylogue fail to think in this direction. And what is this thing called consensus? This is an enticing poison borrowed from the mantra of Hegelian dialectics. That for every encounter between thesis and anti-thesis, a resultant synthesis is inevitable. Well, this does not seem to be correct anymore. Philosophy, I am inclined to think, is sustained at the collision of thesis and anti-thesis and this collision must be continuous. An alternate point of view seems to sustain this progress which should neither terminate at some point nor discontinue for whatever reason or even transform to something else. It is for this reason that conversationalism broaches philosophical problematique as transgenerational. And the process of attending to such problematique should be a critical and a creative continuum – an arumaristics, a reshuffling of thesis and anti-thesis that spins out new concepts and thoughts from the factory line of intercultural ideas. Anything else beyond this ridge, whether one calls it synthesis or consensus, cannot possibly be philosophy in the 'A' sense of the term. Both dialogue and polylogue constantly wobble along this borderline. For these obvious weaknesses, conversationalism is put forward to continue the journey of reason where dialogue and polylogue stall.

Conversationalism, therefore, should be seen more like a meticulous house cleaner that is capable of tidying the house of intercultural philosophy. Much of the confusions about the nature and promise of intercultural philosophy have stemmed from the fogginess around its preferred method. My thinking is that conversationalism might be a desirable methodological option for veritable intercultural engagements.

Also, in these edgy times, when some African scholars are calling for a decolonised and Africanised philosophy, maybe, a methodic orientation inspired and cultivated in the sands of African thought might herald Africa's contribution to the edifice of philosophy. John Lamola (2016, 501-512), Mogobe Ramose (2016, 546-555) as well as Simphiwe Sesanti (2016, 429-443) in various ways have expressed the views that the philosophy curriculum and the history of philosophy itself are too colonial and needed to be decolonised. Others like Thaddeus Metz (2016, 490-500) and Ernst Wolff (2016, 444-459) take a conciliatory path rather than highlight the necessity for decolonisation or Africanisation. While Metz argues that materials from both the African and Western philosophical traditions can be usefully integrated in forging a balanced philosophy curriculum, Wolff is of the view that striking this balance both in terms of curricula and manpower is critical to a more equal philosophy practice in Africa.

What stands out here is the idea of cross-cultural engagement in philosophy, which is encapsulated in the African notion of relationship captured effectively by the method of conversationalism. Obviously, it would not be too much if one adds to this demand the necessity for this intercultural engagement to be at a prime philosophical level undiluted by sentiments of one form or the other which the lure of consensus can supply. To this end, I propose conversationalism as a veritable methodological option for intercultural discourse.

4. Conclusion

In this work, I have formulated a method known as conversationalism inspired by African philosophy and showed that it could be a veritable method for intercultural philosophy. I demonstrated that conversationalism is a methodic extension of the gains of dialogue and polylogue. I argued that conversational relationship is not Hegelian because it aims to avoid synthesis and rather focuses heavily on the reshuffling of thesis and anti-thesis. I gave a background to conversational thinking putting forward two theses that enable one to understand the methodic projection of conversationalism. I further elaborated on the second thesis known as the logical thesis and formulated the principle of CdV to advance a strong argument that truth of propositions may not depend on the facts they assert but rather, on the context in which such propositions are located. I toyed with some new concepts such as 'intercommunication of truth' 'factual anomaly' and 'practical solidarity of truth' to support the above claim. This radical method spun from the cotton of African philosophy, I argued, deserves a place in the methodic accumulations of philosophy perhaps, as a construct that needs to be criticised, accepted or rejected or, which is more important, as something that endorses the viability of the idea of intercultural philosophy.

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