

African Philosophy

BREAK-IT-DOWN LECTURE
RUTGERS 10/19/17
ALEX GUERRERO

Overview

- 1) Preliminaries: my interest in the topic; general reasons to be interested in the topic
- 2) The long history: **Ptah-hotep, Augustine, Zar'a Ya'aqob, Anton Wilhelm Amo**
- 3) The recent history: anthropology, "**ethnophilosophy**," **linguistic philosophy**
Example: Yoruba epistemology
- 4) The recent history: "**sage**" philosophy
- 5) The recent history: postcolonial, independence, professional **philosophy**

Preliminaries

Why African Philosophy? Why African Philosophy?

Personal reasons: -interest in Africa (history, language)
-good fortune in having K. Anthony Appiah around

General reasons: -concerns about parochialism, ideas about universality
-creativity and new views, questioning foundational assumptions
-racism of neglect (Lévy-Bruhl “primitive” mentality, pre-logical, pre-literate, pre-scientific, etc.)
-prompting methodological reflection: what is philosophy? How do we do it? How should we do it?

Preliminaries

Why African Philosophy? Why African Philosophy?

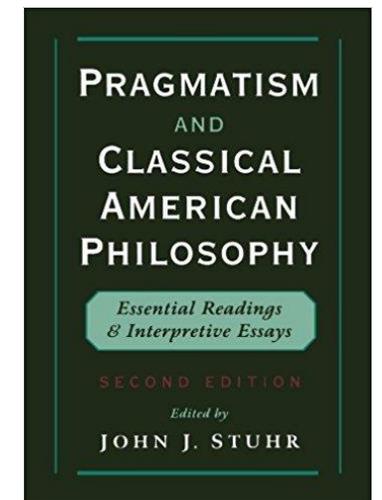
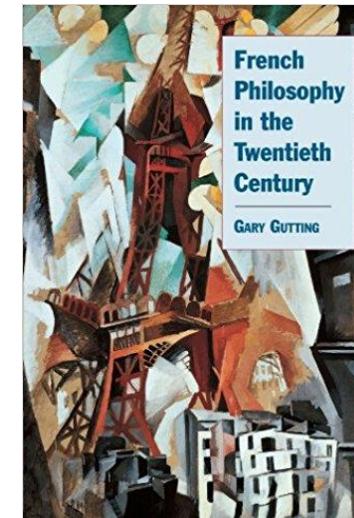
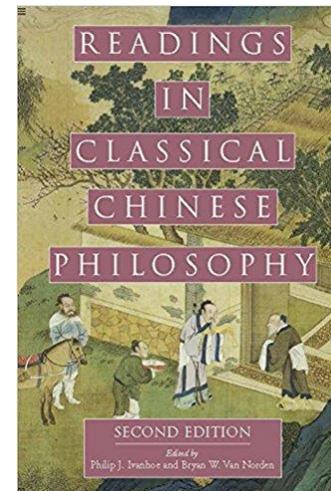
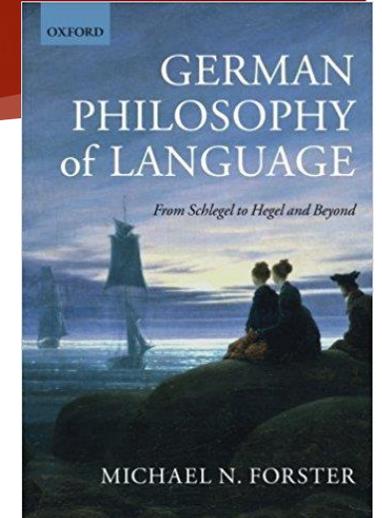
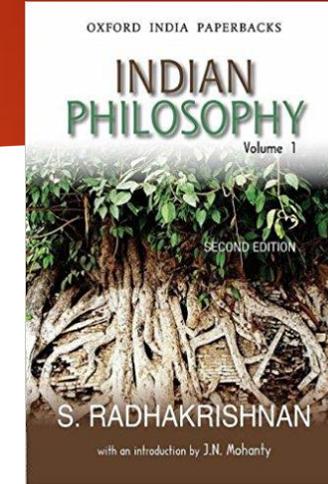
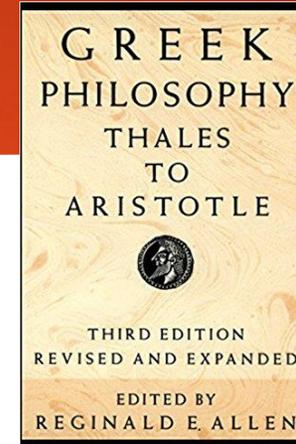
Is this a subfield? What makes the philosophy *African*?

Just geography/biography? Something more?

Simple story: people who (1) wrote philosophy, (2) having grown up in (roughly) the same place, (3) in (roughly) the same cultural space, perhaps (4) working in (roughly) the same language.

This simple story doesn't seem to match our classification practices. (David Lewis, Michael Smith, and David Chalmers vs. Robert Stalnaker, Judith Jarvis Thomson, and Gilbert Harman?)

Bigger issue: some philosophical work is treated as acontextual (even if we can reframe it as, say, late 20th Century Anglophone Analytic Philosophy) and universal, while other work is not.



The Long History

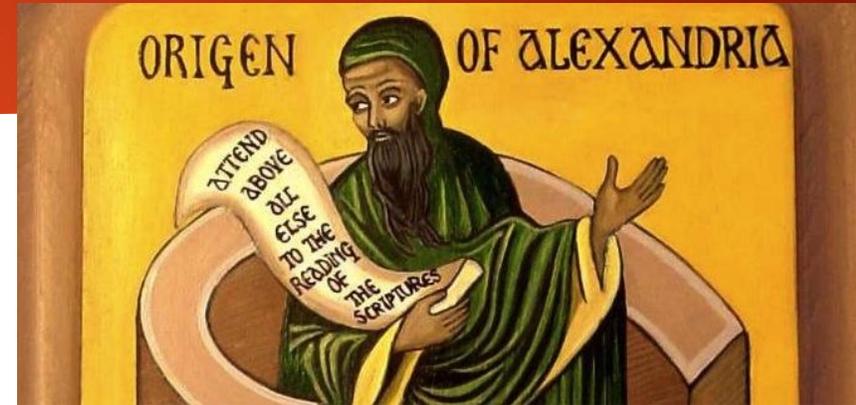
- ▶ **Ptah-hotep** (~2450 BCE), Ancient Egypt
- ▶ Official (“Vizier”) of the Old Kingdom, 5th Dynasty
- ▶ Wrote “Maxims of Ptah-hotep” (“Moral Teachings of Ptah-hotep”)
- ▶ 37 principles that define certain behavior as moral/law (“Maat”).
Emphasis on silence, timing, truthfulness, relationships, and manners
 - ▶ “If you are a man of authority, be patient when you are listening to the words of a petitioner. Do not dismiss him until he has completely unburdened himself of what he had planned to say to you.”
 - ▶ “Injustice exists in abundance, but evil can never succeed in the long run.”
 - ▶ “To listen is better than anything, thus is born perfect love.”
 - ▶ “A perfect word is hidden more deeply than precious stones. It is to be found near the servants working at the mill-stone.”



The Long History

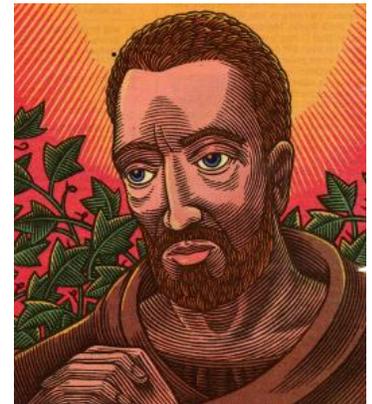
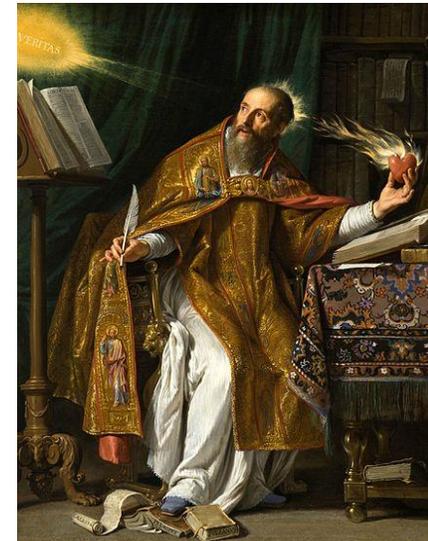
Origen (184-254)

- ▶ Born to an indigenous Christian family in Alexandria, Egypt
- ▶ Historians and commentators of his times refer to him as “the African” suggesting he was either a Punic or a Berber
- ▶ Wrote On First Principles, one of the first philosophical presentations and expositions of Christian dogma, influenced by Plato
- ▶ Hugely influential theological and exegetical writings, comparing earliest versions and translations of the Bible

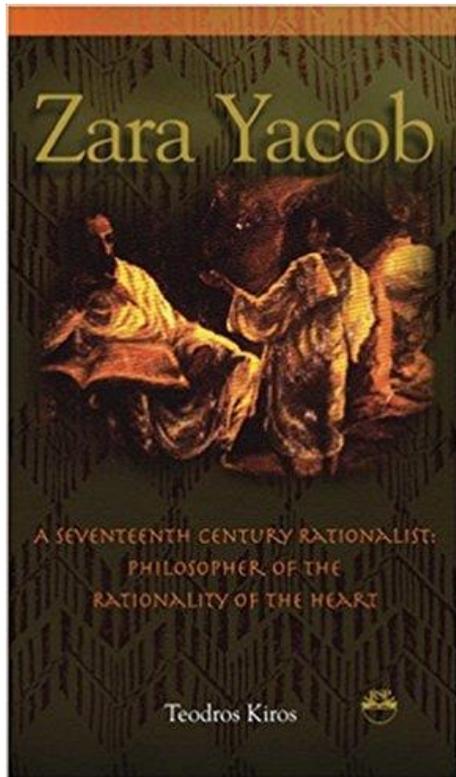


Augustine (354-430)

- ▶ Born of Berber parents in Thagaste (present-day Souk-Ahras, Algeria)
- ▶ Wrote The City of God, Confessions, etc.



The Long History



Zar'a Ya'aqob (or Zera/Zara Yacob) (1599-1692)

- ▶ Born near Aksum, Ethiopia
- ▶ Raised Coptic Christian, fled south when emperor embraced Catholicism.
- ▶ Lived in a cave by the Tekezé River for 2 years, developing his philosophical ideas
- ▶ Wrote the **Hatata** in the Ge'ez language (**The Treatise of Zera Yacob** in English)
 - ▶ Rationalist text, often compared to Descartes' Discourse on Method
 - ▶ "hatata" means "to reduce to small portions by rubbing, to grind" but came to have a figurative meaning "to question bit by bit, piecemeal; to search into or through, to investigate accurately; to examine; to inspect"
 - ▶ Focused on seeking truth through use of human reason and observation of the natural world

The Long History

Zar'a Ya'aqob (or Zera/Zara Yacob) (continued): The Hatata

Yacob's response to exposure to Coptic Christianity, other Christian sects, Islam, Judaism, and Indian religions... dilemma of choosing between these faiths led him to decide to rely upon his own powers of reasoning and understanding:

- ▶ "All men are equal in the presence of God, and all are intelligent, since they are his creatures; he did not assign one people for life, another for death, one for mercy, another for judgment. Our reason teaches us that this kind of discrimination cannot exist in the sight of God."
- ▶ "God indeed has illuminated the heart of man with understanding by which he can see the good and evil, recognize the right and wrong, distinguish truth from error."
- ▶ "Once I asked a 'Frang' (or foreigner) scholar many things concerning our faith: he interpreted them all according to his own faith. Afterwards I asked a well-known Ethiopian scholar and he also interpreted all things according to his own faith. If I had asked the Mohammedans and the Jews, they also would have interpreted according to their own faith; then, where could I obtain a judge that tells the truth? As my faith appears to be true to me, so does another one find his own faith true; but truth is one."

Yacob argues for the view that an action's morality is determined by whether it advances or degrades overall harmony in the world

The Long History

Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703 - ~1760)

- ▶ Ghanaian philosopher, brought to Germany as a child, perhaps as a slave, given as a "present" to Anthony Ulrich, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. He grew up in the Duke's palace in Wolfenbüttel.
- ▶ Educated in Germany, received doctorate in philosophy from University of Wittenberg
- ▶ "About the Rights of Africans in Europe" – argument against the African slave trade
- ▶ "On the Absence of Sensation in the Human Mind and its Presence in our Organic and Living Body" – argued against Descartes' dualism (including noting problems with Descartes' reliance on the pineal gland as the seat of the soul and as a potential solution to the mind-body interaction problem)

Racism, Colonialism, Independence

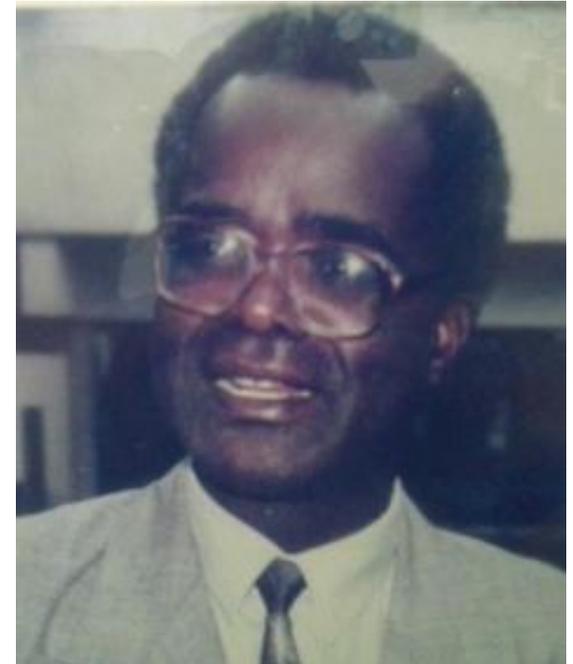
Other figures in the long history, but disconnected, precolonial, often trained or educated elsewhere

Return to the questions: why **African** Philosophy? What makes the philosophy *African*? Just geography? Something more?

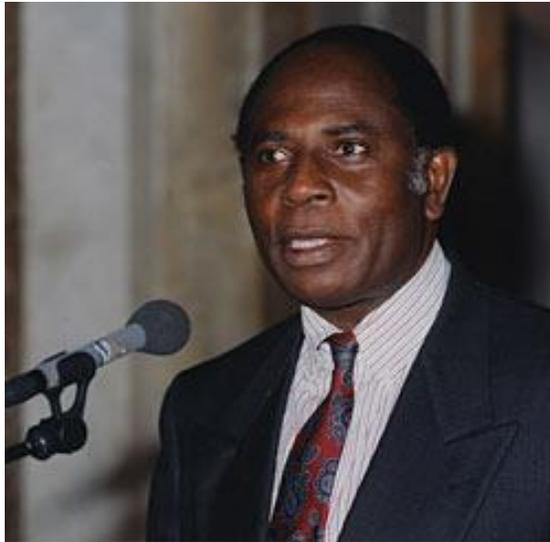
Henry Odera Oruka (Kenyan philosopher, 1944-1995) writing in 1983:

“Current African professional philosophy is predominantly a metaphilosophy. Its central theme is the question “What is philosophy?” And a corollary of this question is “What is African philosophy?”

In actual practice this philosophy is a discussion of the claim to the effect that some given thoughts or beliefs qualify or do not qualify as philosophy. And so it becomes a philosophical analysis and interpretation of the general concept, “philosophy.””



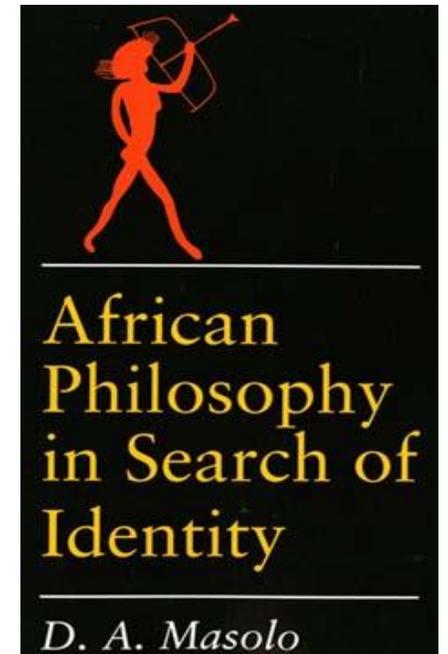
Racism, Colonialism, Independence



These discussions run throughout the history of “African Philosophy,” particularly postcolonial African philosophy

Kwasi Wiredu (Ghanaian philosopher, born 1931, B.Phil at Oxford with Gilbert Ryle, Peter Strawson, and Stuart Hampshire before returning to be a professor at the University of Ghana):

“A principal driving force in postcolonial African philosophy has been a quest for self-definition... This search is part of a general postcolonial soul-searching in Africa. Because the colonialists and related personnel perceived African culture as inferior in at least some important respects, colonialism included a systematic program of de-Africanization.”



The first history of African Philosophy in English (1994)

Racism, Colonialism, Independence

Distinct issues for philosophical work that has come to fall under these three headings:

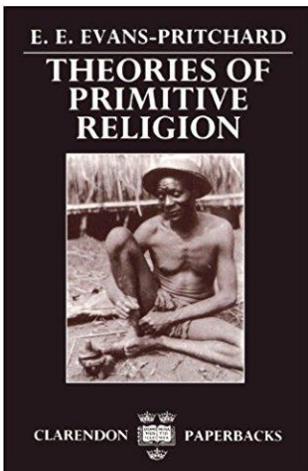
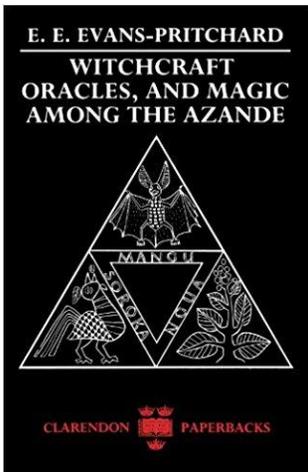
African Philosophy

Indigenous/Native American Philosophy

Latin American Philosophy

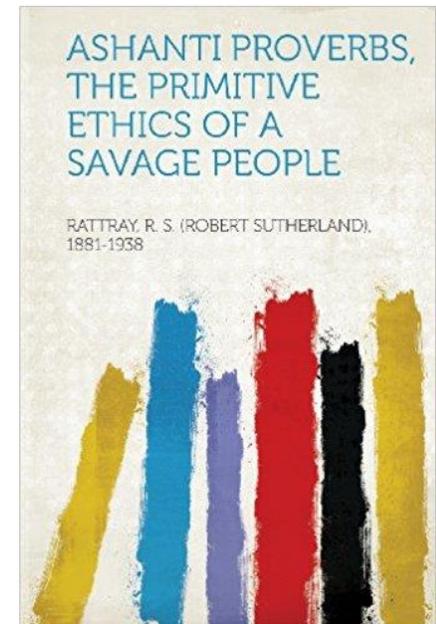
- Issues:
- written vs. unwritten
 - papers and treatises vs. other ways of communicating philosophical content
(proverbs, folktales, songs, funeral dirges, ethical maxims, etc.)
 - philosophy vs. religion
 - individuals as philosophers vs. conceptual analysis + ordinary language to discern
communal philosophies or worldviews
 - racism and other forms of bias: “primitive” people → no philosophy

Racism, Colonialism, Independence



Kwasi Wiredu:

- ▶ Post-independence, in the late 1950s and 1960s, some fields took off: African history and African literature
- ▶ But “African philosophy was usually non-existent in university departments of philosophy in Africa”
- ▶ Some relevant materials from anthropologists
- ▶ But those materials led to early work with “troublesome features”
 1. Narrative and interpretive, but not evaluative
 2. Attributed ideas to whole African peoples, or even the whole African race
 3. Hard to distinguish from a sort of “informal anthropology”

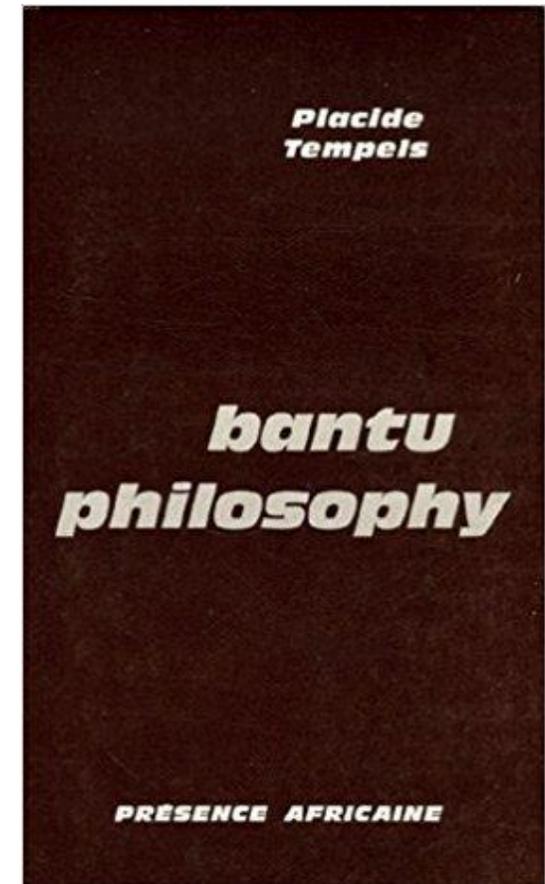


Racism, Colonialism, Independence

An example of this:

Placide Tempels's Bantu Philosophy (1959)

- ▶ Tempels was a Belgian Catholic missionary
- ▶ Ministered to the Baluba of present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo
- ▶ Tempels came to the view that “African peoples actually had a coherent philosophy and that it governed their day-to-day living” as Wiredu puts it—a conclusion that was, in his circles, “revolutionary”
- ▶ But Tempels didn't think much of the philosophy: “No doubt anyone can show the error of their reasoning, but it must none the less be admitted that their notions are based on reason.”



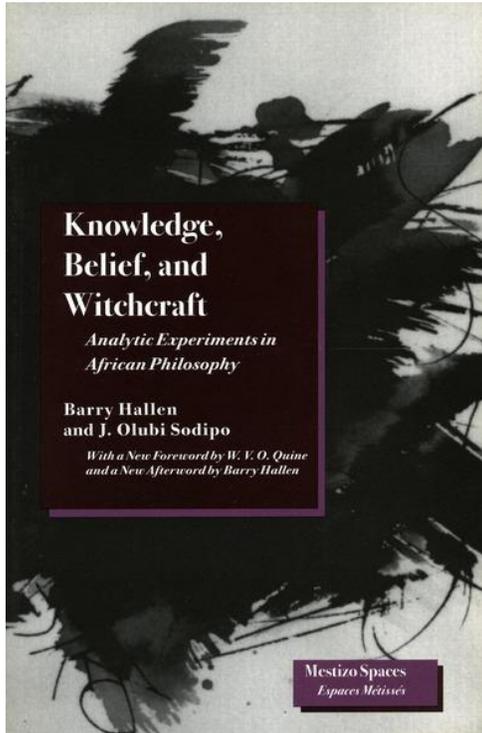
The charge of “ethnophilosophy”



Paulin Hountondji (philosopher from Bénin, b. 1941)

- ▶ Studied at ENS in Paris with Derrida and Althusser, thesis on Husserl
- ▶ In 1970, condemned as “ethnophilosophy” work that purports to be African philosophy, when it displays the following characteristics better suited to cultural anthropology:
 - (1) A philosophy of peoples rather than individuals, not Kantian philosophy but Bantu philosophy
 - (2) Sources are in the past, and must be “authentic,” “traditional,” “pre-colonial” and found in parables, proverbs, poetry, songs from oral traditions
 - (3) Presents African beliefs as unchanging, timeless, and debates are about interpretation of traditions, not about rigorous argumentation or criticism or search for truth

The “linguistic philosophy” response

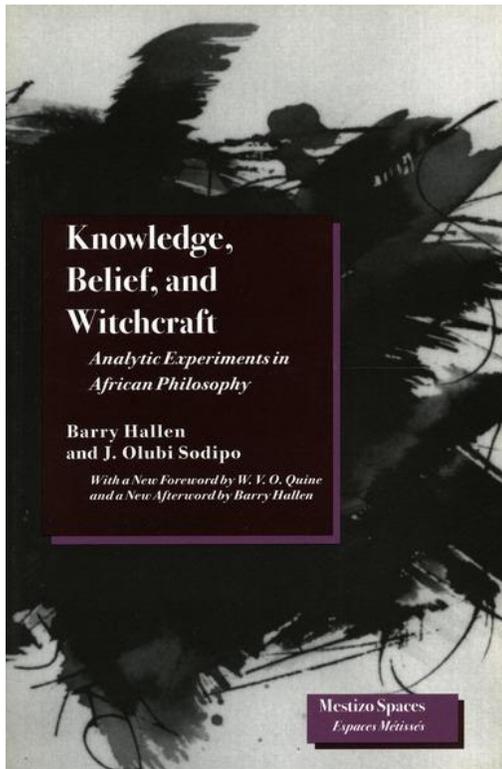


Barry Hallen (American, b. 1941, taught for 20 years in Nigeria before moving to Morehouse College) and **J. Olubi Sodipo** (Nigerian philosopher, 1935-1999)

Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy (1986)

- ▶ Drawing on
 - ▶ naturalistic approach to philosophical questions (Quine)
 - ▶ ordinary language philosophical method (J.L. Austin)
- ▶ Part anthropological fieldwork, part method of cases, part ordinary language analysis of philosophically interesting concepts.
- ▶ Aimed at understanding epistemological concepts as deployed in Yoruba (30 million native speakers) and assessing their similarities and differences with epistemological concepts as deployed in English.
- ▶ Ultimate, aim: to identify the best/correct/true epistemological norms

The “linguistic philosophy” response



Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft (1986)

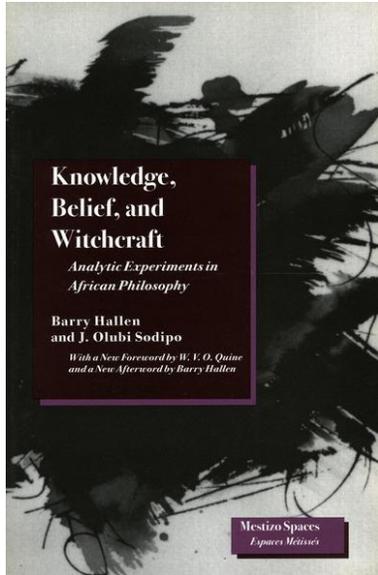
From Quine's foreword to the American Edition:

“This book is philosophical and linguistic, serving both interests. On the philosophical side it embodies the spirit of the philosophy of ordinary language, which flourished in England in the middle decades of this century; but the language concerned, Yoruba, is far from ordinary from an English point of view.

The central epistemological themes of truth, belief, knowledge, and evidence are explored through analytic study of the usage and connotation of the key terms: not these four words, to be sure, but the accepted dictionary counterparts in Yoruba. One's linguistic interest is aroused and nourished by the divergences in usage that emerge between the Yoruba terms and their canonical translations, under the expert interrogation of thoughtful natives by our two philosophically sophisticated authors.

Hints of an alien philosophical orientation emerge, which one might hope to articulate and integrate into a coherent and novel philosophical attitude. This could enrich one's own attitude with a new perspective...”

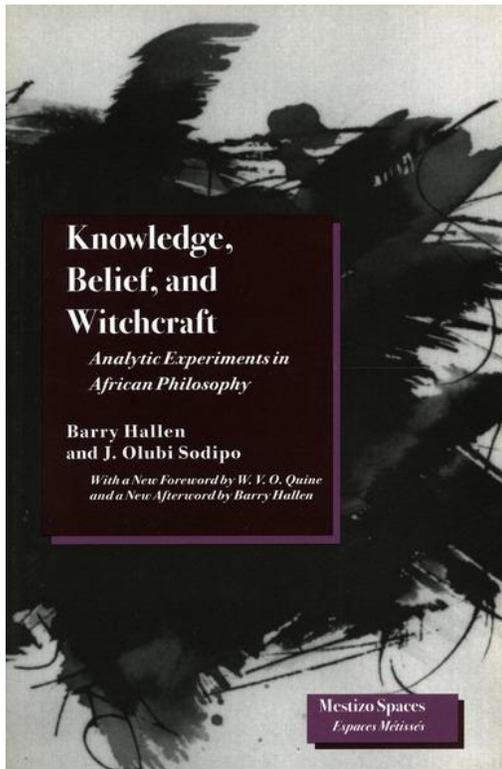
The “linguistic philosophy” response



The Method (as described in Hallen's afterword):

1. Select a field of discourse in an African language to concentrate analysis upon, preferably one that is related to the concerns of academic philosophy.
2. Collect all vocabulary that may be relevant
3. For collecting such information it is better to work with a group of indigenes, more or less as colleagues
4. The different members of the group should accept the same general methodological approach
5. Collect and/or construct paradigm cases or examples of situations where this vocabulary is used in the correct way
6. Also pay attention to examples of incorrect usage
7. While considering the examples of usage, amplify the meanings and applications of key terms on the basis of extensive discussions with one's indigenous colleagues
8. Pay special attention to the empirical conditions, criteria, and content of each term as used
9. Research what other scholars (philosophers, anthropologists, linguists, ethnologists) have said about this particular field of discourse in whatever African language you have chosen
10. Resist wholesale importation of academic philosophical theories as vehicles for the explication of African meanings.

The “linguistic philosophy” response



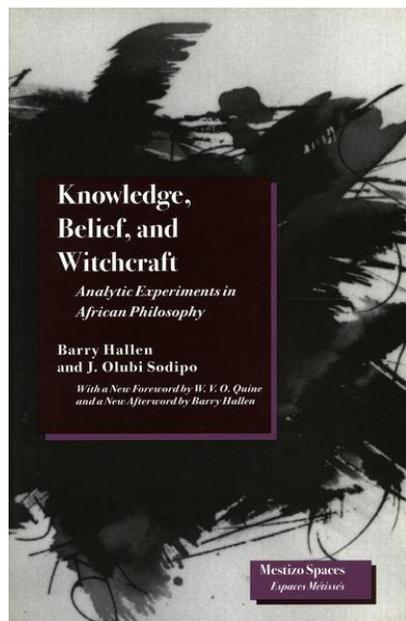
- ▶ Importantly, Hallen and Sodipo note:

“If we make use of the first-order, second-order distinction, ordinary usage (the way people who speak the language in everyday life use the word ‘believe’) is a first-order enterprise. It is commonplace to find that such usages are inconsistent with one another and that the criteria distinguishing them are not always clear, or even articulated. The philosopher who takes an interest in the confusions of everyday language may therefore choose to go a step further and recommend a (second-order) theory of belief, which would have serious practical consequences that involve clarifications and changes in ordinary usage.

The important point is that such a theory of belief is not meant simply to *reflect* ordinary usage. It is meant to *reform* it. Consequently it will almost certainly be inconsistent with ordinary usage on a number of important points.” (p. 56)

- ▶ Their enterprise in KBW is mostly of the first-order variety, but it is with an eye toward the broader second-order enterprise.

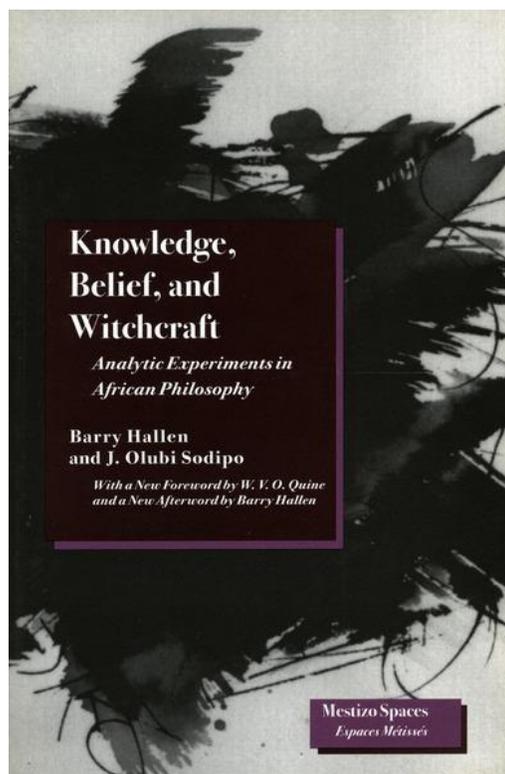
The “linguistic philosophy” response



Rough dictionary equivalents:

English	Yoruba
know	mọ
knowledge	ìmọ
believe (agree to accept)	gbàgbọ
belief	ìgbàgbọ
see (visual perception)	rí
true/truth	òótọ

The “linguistic philosophy” response



- ▶ Just as philosophers don't turn to dictionary definitions to answer philosophical questions, so, too, we shouldn't assume that rough translational equivalents are fully equivalent.
- ▶ Hallen and Sodipo note that in English philosophical work, distinctions are drawn between
 - ▶ knowing that
 - ▶ knowing how
 - ▶ knowing by acquaintance
 with different claims made about the relations amongst these.
- ▶ There also, of course, have been efforts made trying to identify the relationship between belief, evidence, truth, and knowledge, making claims about what beyond true belief is required for knowledge, what kinds of evidence is sufficient for knowledge, and so on.
- ▶ A key point for Hallen and Sodipo is that we can't just assume that the complex relations that we might think hold between belief, knowledge, and truth are the same as the complex relations that hold between ìgbàgbo, ìmo, and òóto
- ▶ These abstract concepts might well have important differences, and those differences might be of interest to us as philosophers

The “linguistic philosophy” response

Two necessary conditions for something to count as **ìmọ**.

You only **mọ** X if

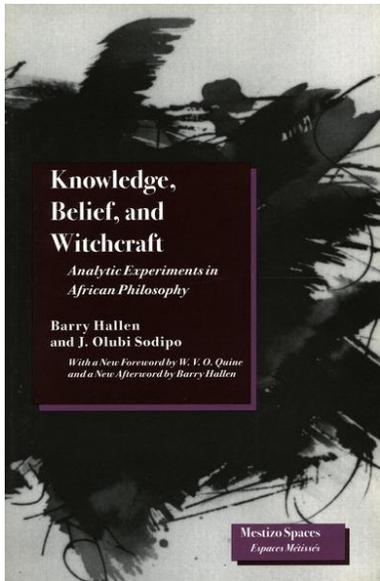
(1) you have first-hand visual experience of X

e.g. “We will say that our fathers said this kind of thing has happened before. Those who are dead cannot **mọ** what is happening now. And we cannot **mọ** what they have done in the past... You can only **mọ** the one you see with your own eyes.”

(2) you comprehend what you are seeing and judge that you have seen X

ọkọn is the Yoruba word for heart or mind, but has a role something like “consciousness” or a morally neutral “conscience”

e.g. In some cases, it may be “that your **ọkọn** does not witness the thing—whether it is or is not. This is when you see something, but you are having two thoughts about it.”



The “linguistic philosophy” response

Arguably, there is a third necessary condition:

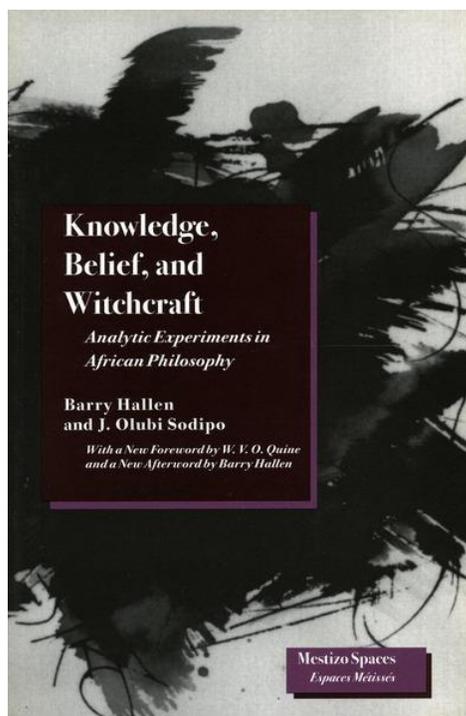
You only **mọ** X if

(3) X is òóto

where **òóto** is something like “true”

(although it appears to be a property of both experiences and statements/propositions)

e.g. “The one you use your own eyes to see and which your **okọ**n witnesses you that it is **òóto** -- this is the best.”



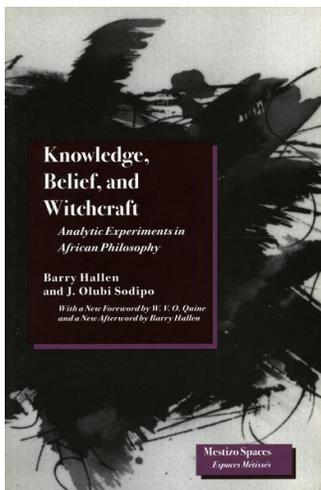
The “linguistic philosophy” response

Importantly, this rules out **ìmọ** via testimony or second-hand information:

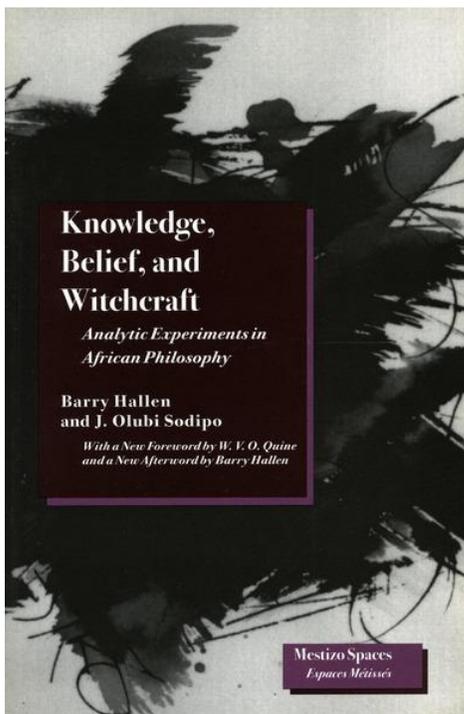
“The point of difference between the two systems that we find to be of greatest significance is the relative role of testimony or second-hand information. In the Yoruba system any information conveyed on the basis of testimony is, until [first-personally] verified, **ìgbàgbọ**. In the English system a vast amount of information conveyed on the basis of testimony is, without verification, classified as ‘knowledge that.’ Much of the latter is information that the individual concerned would not even know *how* to verify. Yet it is still ‘knowledge that.’” (p. 81)

e.g. “What you use your own eyes to see – this is not what you are told. What you are told may not be true (**òótọ**). But if you use your own eyes to touch it, like this [gesture], you will understand it. You’ve used your own eyes to see it.” (p. 64)

e.g. “If you have been noticing the behavior of a person, we can say, ‘He can do a certain kind of thing’. But if he has not done such a thing in [before] your eyes, you will say, ‘I gbàgbọ.’ But if he has done such a thing in your eyes, you will say, ‘I mọ.’ This means it is clear in your eyes.” (p. 65)



The “linguistic philosophy” response



Similarities between English (**believe/know**) and Yoruba (**gbàgbọ/mọ**) systems

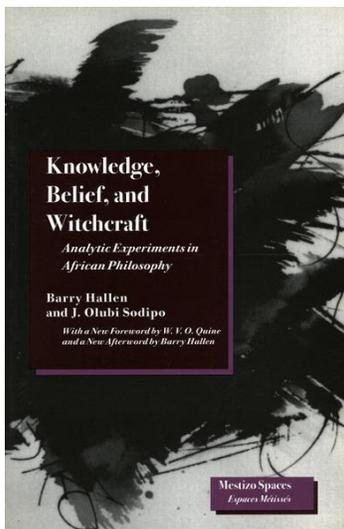
- ▶ For both, greater certitude attached to know/mọ
- ▶ For both, possible for belief and ìgbàgbọ to become knowledge and ìmọ

Questions about the similarities and differences of the functional/practical role of classifying something as knowledge or ìmọ

The “linguistic philosophy” response

Questions we might pursue:

1. What is true about *ìmọ* with respect to questions that have been asked about knowledge?
 - a. Knowledge-Action thesis?
 - b. KK thesis and luminosity about knowledge?
 - c. Knowledge first, knowledge as a mental state?
 - d. Knowledge as an achievement?
2. What do we think (from a social epistemic vantage point) of treating testimony and second-hand information differently? (Fake news...)
3. What is the Yoruba response to issues about hallucination, visual illusion, dreaming, skeptical scenarios?
4. How do these epistemological commitments interact with facts about the scope, scale, anonymity, etc. of daily life and individual projects?



The “linguistic philosophy” response

Other work in this vein: **Kwame Gyekye** (Ghanaian, b. 1939)

An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme (1987)

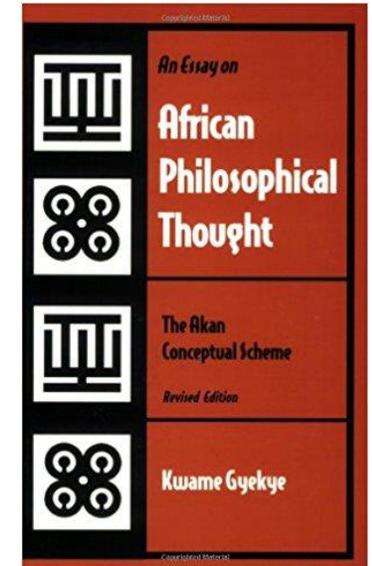
Engages in similar analysis, but with Akan language (22 million native speakers)

Focuses on

- ▶ Concepts of being and causality
- ▶ Concept of a person
- ▶ Free will and responsibility
- ▶ Metaethics, ethics, and character
- ▶ Existence, predication, identity

Other significant methodological differences

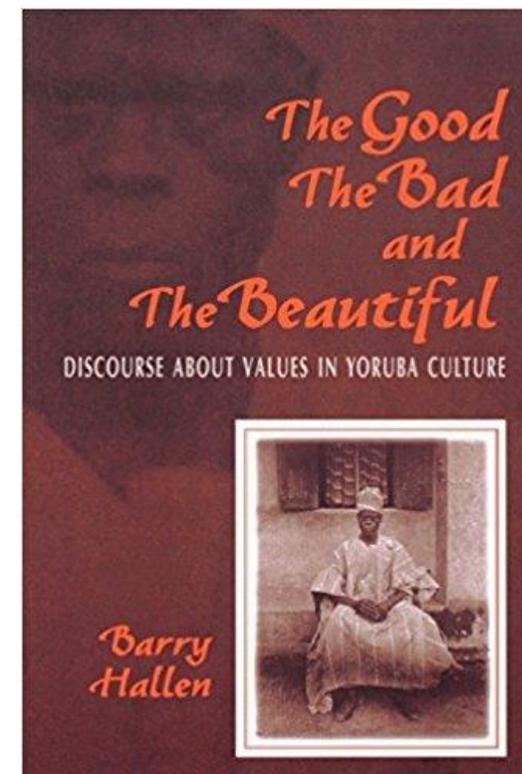
- ▶ Greater reliance on proverbs as revelatory of philosophical commitments
- ▶ Explicit consultation with “sages” in traditional Ghanaian society
- ▶ Effort made by Gyekye at “second-order” level to bring these views into theoretical order



The “linguistic philosophy” response

Other work in this vein: **Barry Hallen**, *The Good, The Bad, and The Beautiful: Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture* (2000)

- ▶ Focuses on
 - ▶ Moral epistemology
 - ▶ Moral responsibility
 - ▶ Moral Value and the Good
 - ▶ Aesthetic Value and Beauty
 - ▶ The relationship between moral and aesthetic value
- ▶ On the Yoruba view Hallen describes, the purest expression of beauty is to possess good moral character
- ▶ Perhaps more reliance in this work on the thoughts of Yoruba **onísègùn**, those taken to be the wisest and most accomplished traditional healers



The “ethnophilosophy” worry, revisited

- (1) A philosophy of peoples rather than individuals
- (2) Sources are in the past, and must be “authentic,” “traditional,” “pre-colonial” and found in parables, proverbs, poetry, songs from oral traditions
- (3) Presents African beliefs as unchanging, timeless, and debates are about interpretation of traditions, not about rigorous argumentation or criticism or search for truth

(1) Remains a worry, at least at this stage

(2) Might not be a worry, although “linguistic competence” replaces “authenticity”

(3) Perhaps less of a worry, although it might depend on what happens next

Key for this approach: eventually, after the first-order views are in view, begin the second-order theorizing

Still counts as African, because of the first-order starting point...

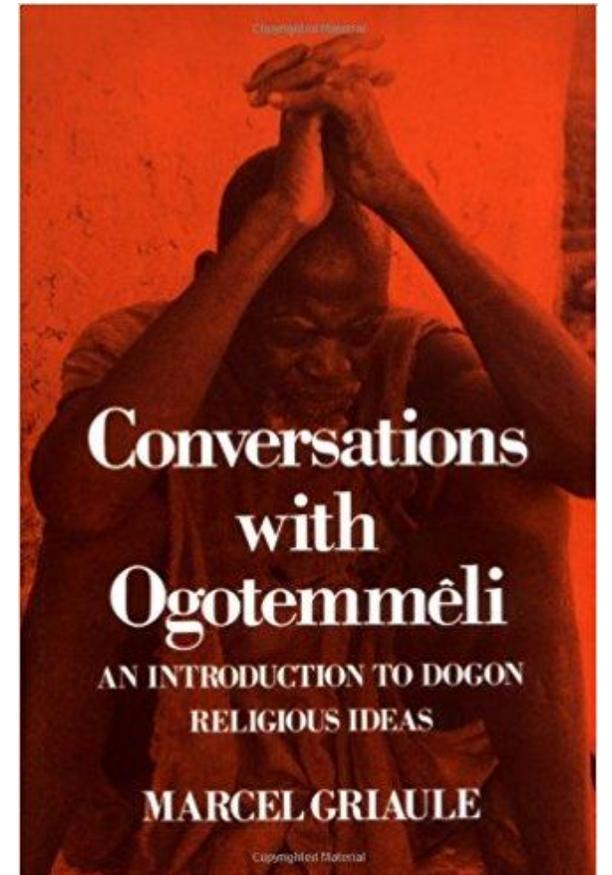
An alternative: “sage” philosophy

An alternative methodology:

Identify the intellectual elite, philosophically-minded members of a community, and have conversations with them and write those conversations down.

e.g. **Marcel Griaule** (1898 – 1956), French Anthropologist who worked with Dogon people in Mali

Published French version of Conversations with Ogotemmêli in 1948.



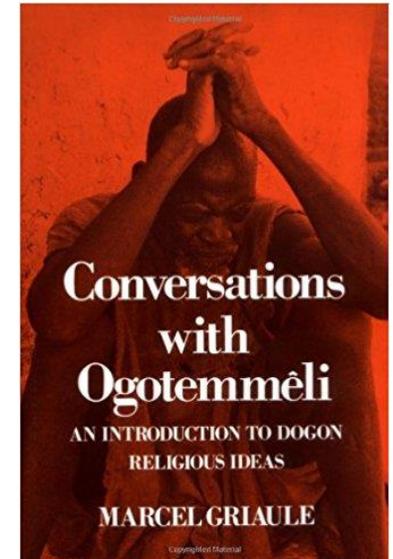
An alternative: “sage” philosophy

From Griaule's preface:

“In his notable book Bantu Philosophy (1945), Reverend Father Placide Tempels ... raised the question of whether ‘Bantu thought should not be regarded as a system of philosophy’.

As a result of patient and methodical research, pursued for 15 years from the time when the first steps were taken in the rocky cliffs of Bandiagara, this question can now be answered: for these people live by a cosmogony, a metaphysic, and a religion which put them on a part with the peoples of antiquity, and which Christian theology might indeed study with profit.

The teaching on these subjects was imparted to the author by a venerable individual, Ogotemmêli... This man, a hunter who had lost his sight by an accident, was able, as a result of his infirmity, to devote long and careful study to these things. Endowed with exceptional intelligence... and a wisdom, the fame of which has spread throughout his country, he had quickly appreciated the interest attaching to the ethnological work of the Europeans, and had been waiting 15 years for an opportunity to impart his knowledge to them... In October 1946 he summoned the author to his house, and on thirty-three successive days, in a series of unforgettable conversations, he laid bare the framework of a world system, the knowledge of which will revolutionize all accepted ideas about the mentality of Africans and of primitive peoples in general.”

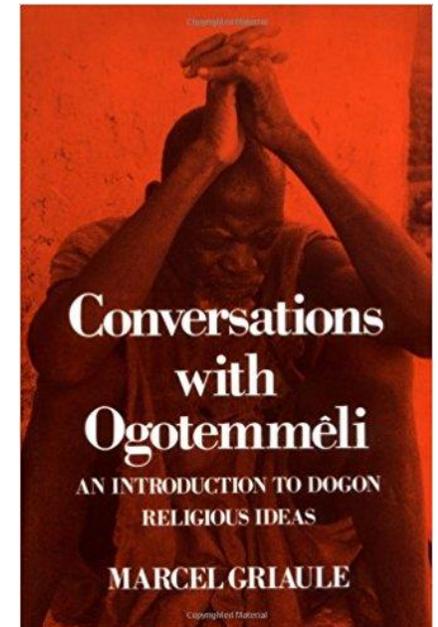


Toward *real* “sage” philosophy

Henry Odera Oruka in “Sagacity in African Philosophy”:

“Marcel Griaule's *Ogotemmêli*, in spite of the seemingly significant ideas attributed to him, is not a sage in the second order. He is an expert in culture philosophy of the Dogon community. He says hardly anything which suggests a thought beyond the generally given and revered Dogon beliefs. And even most of what he says is known to be common knowledge to the average member of his tribe.”

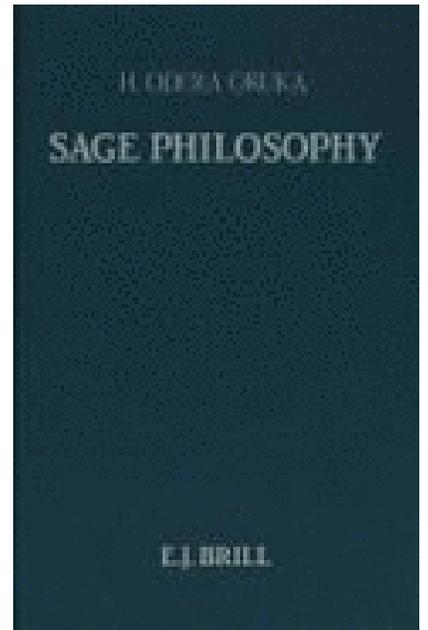
Griaule himself says, in the preface: “But although the full range of this teaching is known only to the elders and to certain initiates, it is not esoteric in character since anyone who reaches old age can acquire it.”



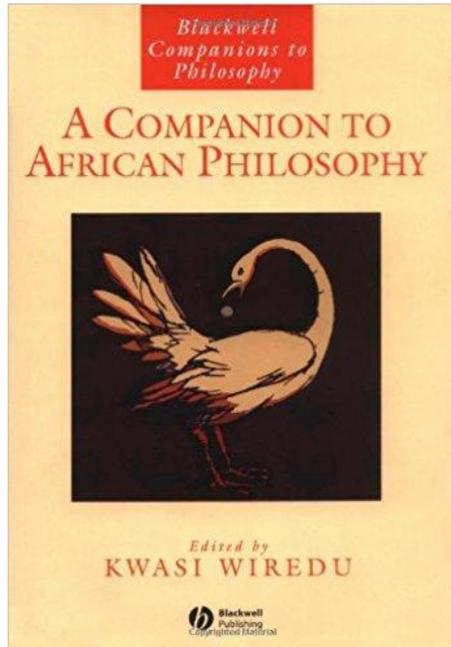
Toward real “sage” philosophy

Henry Odera Oruka, Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and the Modern Debate on African Philosophy (1990)

- ▶ Sought out individuals among traditional Kenyans who were well known for wisdom and for their independence from foreign influences
- ▶ Held and recorded long question-and-answer sessions
- ▶ Published translations of these discussions, along with the names and pictures of the sages involved
- ▶ Some of the sages were quite critical of the traditional/communal thought of their society, including endorsing atheism



Independence and professional African Philosophy



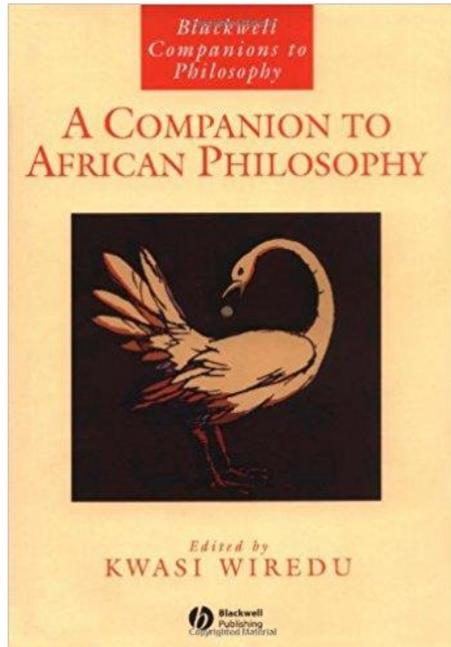
Kwasi Wiredu, "Introduction: African Philosophy in Our Time," in [A Companion to African Philosophy](#) (Blackwell, 2004)

"Contemporary work in African philosophy has a certain richness deriving from its unavoidably comparative character. This is due to the interesting fact that contemporary African philosophers belong to two cultural traditions, the African and the Western. This can be an advantage, because working with more than one tradition can broaden your mind by acquainting you with a multiplicity of fundamentally different conceptual options. But it is also a problem, because African philosophers came to be situated within the Western tradition through the historical adversity of colonialism." (p. 10)

Independence and professional African Philosophy

Philosopher	Western Education
Kwasi Wiredu	Oxford
Paulin Hountondji	ENS
Kwame Gyekye	Harvard University
K. Anthony Appiah	Cambridge University
Henry Odera Oruka	Uppsala University and Wayne State University
Segun Gbadegesin	University of Wisconsin-Madison
Kwame Nkrumah	University of Pennsylvania
Julius Nyerere	University of Edinburgh

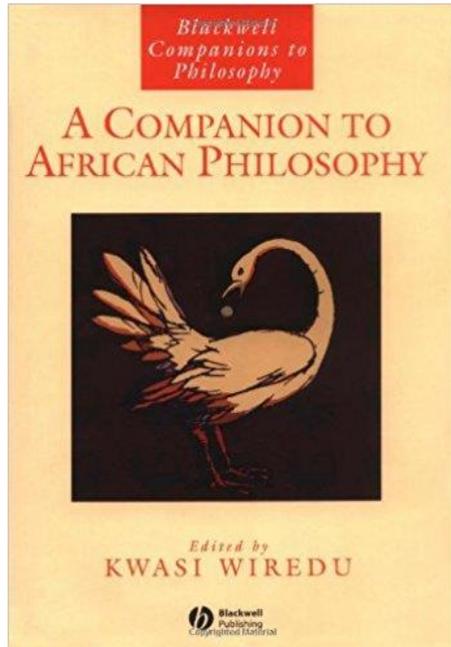
Independence and professional African Philosophy



Central issues for contemporary African professional philosophy

- ▶ Decolonization of concepts and the colonial mindset
- ▶ Universality and Relativism
- ▶ Colonialism, Independence, Democracy, and Political Philosophy
- ▶ Markets and Marxism
- ▶ Concepts of Personhood
- ▶ Ethics and Religion
- ▶ Tradition and Modernity
- ▶ Africa and the African diaspora

Independence and professional African Philosophy



New directions

- ▶ Increasingly sophisticated anthropology and psychology, used to inform philosophical work
- ▶ Experimental Philosophy and African Philosophy
- ▶ Feminist African Philosophy
- ▶ Academic partnerships with China and Chinese-African comparative philosophy

Lessons and Questions about Method

Steve Stich's short review of Hallen and Sodipo from (1987) in Ethics:

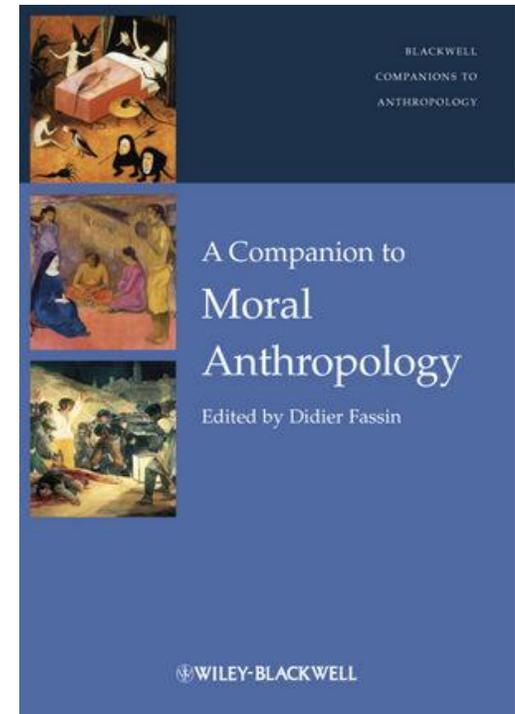
"Analytic philosophers have invested enormous amounts of energy attempting to analyze various terms that play a central role in our everyday thinking about the epistemic and ethical dimensions of our lives. It is often supposed that the conceptions underlying these terms are universals of human culture. The fascinating thesis of this intriguing little book is that this supposition is false.

The authors, both philosophers, ply the skills of the analytic philosopher on some common terms used by the Yoruba people in southwestern Nigeria. In their longest chapter, they focus on *mo* and *gbagbo*, which the standard dictionaries render as "knowledge" and "belief." But, they argue, the Yoruba terms do not correspond to "knowledge" and "belief" since *mo* applies only to information about which one has personal experience. What one learns via indirect evidence, or from the reports of others, no matter how reliable or trustworthy, can never be more than *gbagbo*. ... Though the authors do not develop the point, there is something profoundly subversive in all this. If our own epistemic notions are local cultural products, why should they be of any more than anthropological interest?"

Lessons and Questions about Method

Questions about method and training:

- ▶ Where does the method of ordinary language analysis seem most compelling?
- ▶ Issues have been raised about the universality of intuitions and judgments about cases. Does this kind of comparative philosophy suggest an even deeper problem?
- ▶ If we aren't doing conceptual analysis of just our local philosophical concepts, what are we doing? How can we best do it? How does knowledge of conceptual diversity affect our views?
- ▶ If we are looking to understand cultural conceptual diversity, what tools should we use: experimental psychology, anthropology, linguistics—some combination of these?
- ▶ Should philosophers be required to engage with “comparative” philosophy as part of their philosophical education?



If interested in going further...

Barry Hallen's encyclopedic reference list: <http://www.barryhallen.com/id15.html>

The PhilPapers African Philosophy listings, edited by Barry Hallen: <https://philpapers.org/browse/african-philosophy>

There are currently Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entries for all of the following:

African Philosophy: Ethics

African Philosophy: sage philosophy

Akan Philosophy: of the person

And with planned entries on:

African Philosophy: Africana aesthetics

African Philosophy: ethnophilosophy

African Philosophy: meta-philosophy

African Philosophy: philosophy of religion

Akan Philosophy: ethics and political philosophy

Yoruba Philosophy: epistemology

Yoruba Philosophy: ethics and aesthetics